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THE DOOR WAS PUSHED OPEN

A YANKEE GIRL

IN OLD CALIFORNIA

A Story for Girls

BY

MRS. EVELYN RAYMOND

Author of "My Lady Barefoot," etc.

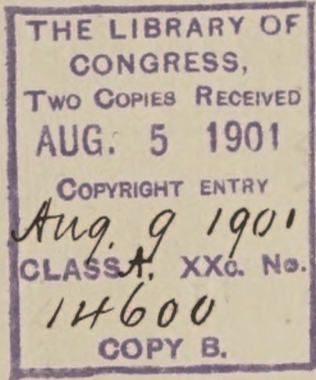
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A Yankee Girl in Old California

CHAPTER I

THE SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS

HAVING finished her note, Miss Comfort Hale stepped to the kitchen door of the parsonage and called :

“Eli ! E-li Johnson !”

The cry elicited no response ; and, after a moment's wait, the lady drew her shoulder-shawl up over her head and crossed the graveled driveway between the house and the stable. Peering in, she again summoned :

“E-li ! E-l-i ! Mr. John—son !”

“Ma'am ?” said a voice so close to Miss Comfort that she jumped.

“Well, of all things ! Didn't you hear me before ?”

“Yes, ma'am,” answered Eli, who scorned a falsehood.

“Why didn’t you answer, then?”

“Well, because I wasn’t ready then, if you want to know the exact why and wherefore.”

The mistress of the house caught her breath. The man’s audacity was almost unbearable; yet—she was the minister’s daughter and it would not do to show the indignation she felt. Besides that, “help” was difficult to secure, in that small village, where each man served himself and real poverty was unknown. To retain the assistance—she would never presume to call it service—of this capable Eli she had to ignore much that was unpleasant. She ignored his independence at that moment, and replied very calmly:

“When you have finished your chores I’d like to have you carry a letter to Mary Foster, Edith’s friend, near the town hall; and bring back an answer.”

“I guess I know where the Fosters live. I was brought up here in Sissmissit, wasn’t I?”

Miss Hale vouchsafed no further speech, but, reflecting upon the contrariness of men in general and of Eli Johnson in particular, hurried back through the sharp January air into the warm kitchen.

Left to his own devices, Eli proceeded to kick the cat, which had thrust its nose into the pail of milk which he had just set down.

"Scat ! scat, I say ! Never saw the way things go ! Life's one long burden and I shan't be sorry when the turmile's over and I'm at rest. Go to the village, eh ? Thinks I need directin' on my way, 's if I was a four-year-old. Silly women—silly women."

There was nobody to hear Eli's grumbling except Daisy, the cow, and the long-suffering Ma'am Puss. Both were well accustomed to it and understood its sound if not its sense. Also both seemed to realize that while one was being corrected it was the other one's chance to enjoy herself ; therefore, since the cat was skurrying out of the way, Daisy promptly nosed her hay over and out of the manger, in pursuit of a sweeter morsel than ordinary. Being a well-trained cow, she knew perfectly that this was misbehavior on her part and that the rejected food would be immediately forked up and thrust back under her stall. But Daisy was young and giddy and cared not for the future so long as she could enjoy the present.

Still she kept a wary eye upon her master's

movements, which, owing to his trials with his mistress, were less methodical and decided than usual. He wandered about the great, sweet-smelling place, which his absolute neatness kept like a parlor; dusting off the harness that was already speckless; straightening boxes and barrels, that even then stood compact and orderly, and conducting himself generally like one whose thoughts wander from the task his hands are doing. To all, there was the steady running accompaniment of his grumbling.

“Must think I’m made of iron. I’ve been to the village once to-day. Why couldn’t she be a mite considerate and write all her letters in the morning? Just like women. Pshaw! She flustered me up, comin’ over here and yellin’ at me that way so’t I forgot to bed Daisy. Hi! Get over, there! Get over, I say!” and he thumped the pretty Alderney with the handle of his hayfork.

Daisy, being a creature of spirit, remonstrated by switching Eli’s face with her tail, as she moved across her stall. But her delicate nostrils still sought among her fodder for the tidbit she craved, and her brown eyes remained placidly innocent.

Eli forked and patted the straw bedding, still lamenting :

“ I’ll bet my old hat that Maria, too, will have some sort of mean job laid by for me now. Chopping mince-meat, or cracking shell-barks ; —I see she had a pan of ’em set out on the table when I went in to warm my feet. She didn’t say nothin’, though, not then. She knew ’twa’n’t the right time. That’s one consolation, if Maria is a botherer she’s learned the times an’ seasons for tryin’ it. Sho ! you creatur’ ! If I haven’t got to go ’round front now an’ clean up that hay you’ve messed. Oh ! dear ! if I wasn’t minister’s folks I believe—I’d—say—words ! ”

But being both a professor and a member of the ministerial household, Eli’s most vicious expletive was an occasional : “ Zach-a-ri-as ! ” This burst from him, presently, as in passing along the dim aisle between Daisy’s manger and the haymow, he stumbled over Ma’am Puss, who had returned to the milk-pail, and, in the rapidly increasing dimness of the barn, was unseen by him.

Just then the stable door again opened and a girlish voice came in with the rush of frosty air. A bright, uncovered head followed the voice

and a burst of laughter echoed Eli's exclamation :

"Oh ! Eli—Eli ! do I hear or am I dreaming ? Maria says supper is ready and that you're so cross to-day she's afraid to come herself and tell you."

"Hmm ! She is, is she ? Well, it's rather late in life for her to be getting scared of her own husband, I think. Scared ! If she hasn't had the whip-hand of me ever since we was married, I'll lose my guess. You go right back and tell her I say I won't come till I'm notified. If a man ain't good enough to be called to his victuals he's too good to eat 'em." Whereupon, the crabbed old fellow stuck his fork into the mow with such force that its handle cracked.

"Oh ! Eli, Eli ! Is this the way I've brought you up ? What's the matter with my poor dear ?" demanded Edith, laughing and running to throw her arms about the bent shoulders of the old man. This familiarity was perfectly natural to these two, though to others it might have seemed out of place. But Eli boasted that the Johnson blood was "as good as anybody's in Sissmissit and a little better, too," while his position in the pastor's household was one of

equality. He and his wife, Maria, always ate at the family table, nor were their voices silent during any discussion that might arise there. He had carried Edith in his arms when she was a baby and loved her well enough to do so still had she desired it. Next to her grandfather, the old clergyman, she was dearer to him than any human being, and his countenance softened visibly under the spell of her caressing touch upon his shoulders.

“Well, it’s a shame, I say. A burnin’ shame for a man’s folks to treat him so.”

“So it is, poor Eli! Waffles, though? Waffles and maple syrup! Syrup from the West Hill farm. Umm.” She smacked her lips, tantalizingly.

“S’pose I can overlook it for once. Women ain’t to blame for being silly as I know of. I suppose the Lord made ’em, but——”

“You don’t see why. Eh? Well, isn’t it nice out here? It’s the dearest, sweetest, cleanest barn in all the neighborhood. I know, for I’ve been in every one, I reckon. I love it. Aunty Comfort says you’re more than fastidiously neat, you’re fuss-tidious. By the way, Eli, do you know what to-morrow will be?”

"Indeed, I do. Don't suppose I'd forget that, do you?"

The old man's face was now bright and cheerful; that is, as nearly so as it ever could become; for while she talked the girl had moved about the barn floor, helping give the finishing touches to Eli's chores, and making him understand without words that, no matter how little others might care for him, she, at least, loved him sincerely.

When nothing more could be done, she ordered him to pick up his pail and accompany her to the house. He lifted it promptly enough, but grumblingly explained that its contents must all go into the pig-trough.

"Ma'am puss, again?"

"Yes. The pesky creatur'. I'm going to get rid of her before I sleep."

"You're going to do nothing of the kind. You wouldn't hurt a hair of her beautiful coat for all the milk Miss Daisy would give this winter! Whew! Isn't it cold! If the snow doesn't come there'll be lovely skating to-morrow. For a treat I mean to ask Aunty Comfort to let me go for a little while, if she can spare me."

The hired man cast a curious glance upon the fair face and then turned his own aside rather hastily. He suggested that she should "run in" while he locked the stable door and his voice was no longer harsh, though it had become a trifle husky.

"Lock the stable door! Lock the stable door? Why, you never did such a thing in your life, Eli Johnson. Why should you begin it at this late day?"

"You go in, honey. I'd better. There was a horse stole, over to Concord, not long ago." He pronounced it "Cawnco'd."

"Old Derry isn't worth stealing, even if there were anybody round who didn't love Grandpa too well to do it. Heigho! 'I had a little dog, his name was Buff! I sent him to the corner for a ha'porth of snuff!'" cried the girl, as at that instant the house door again opened and a homely yellow cur came bounding out toward her.

Then there was a moment's frolic between Buff and his mistress, to which Eli put an end, with the remark:

"It won't pay to play around in this cold, bareheaded. You'll be getting the pneumonia, and that'll give you the consumption and——"

Edith clapped her hands over her ears, laughing as she did so, yet obeyed instantly. She was a perfectly strong and vigorous girl, but the word "consumption" had been the bane of her short life. She had heard it from kinsfolk and neighbors ever since she could remember, and had been reminded that her parents had both died victims of the scourge; till there had roused and matured within her the fierce determination that "If die I must I never will of that hateful disease."

As far as she had been permitted she had early begun to harden herself against her hereditary ailment; and was, probably, the only girl in Sissmissit who knew the luxury of a daily cold plunge, or the enjoyment of a long walk each day, no matter what the weather.

Rather to silence Eli's remonstrance than from any fear of taking cold she hastily ran indoors and thereby disappointed Buff of his evening's fun.

"Where's the milk, Eli?" asked Maria, who was Miss Comfort's household assistant.

"Where 'tis about half the time. In the pig trough."

"Eli—Johnson! again?"

"Yes. Again. I ain't given to joking, am I?"

Miss Hale protested, sternly :

"If you aren't man enough, or haven't gump-tion enough, to keep a cat out of your milk-pail you ought to get rid of the cat."

"I'm goin' to get rid of her this very night. You don't s'pose I enjoy wastin' good stuff, do you?"

"Here's Grandpa," announced Edith, interposing the minister's gracious presence between these opponents. Then she ran to put his chair ready at the table's head and to stand beside it till he should come.

Indeed, the whole household stood while the clergyman uttered the simple grace before meat, which was, perhaps, all the more deeply felt because of its brevity. Then Maria served the waffles and Miss Comfort poured the tea, and there ensued the customary household talk over the events of the day. But it was noticeable that after a brief time the speech flagged and the minister relapsed into an abstracted mood, unusual to him. His daughter, also, soon left the conversation to Edith and Eli, who kept it up for a time till, influenced by the example of the others, they, too, became silent.

But when Mr. Hale absently turned the syrup into his teacup and vainly tried to spread lump sugar on his waffles, the astonished girl exclaimed :

“Why, what has happened ! what’s making everybody so serious ? One would think that something far more dreadful than my sixteenth birthday was coming to-morrow. Any bad news from anywhere, Grandfather, dear ?”

“It is no news, child. No, it is nothing new.”

He glanced across toward Comfort, sitting grimly behind her teapot, but she shook her head negatively. So the gentle old man sheltered himself afresh in his silence and, much sooner than was his habit, rose from the supper-table and returned to his study.

“Why, Aunty Comfort ! Is Grandpa going to write any more to-night ? I didn’t know he was especially busy. Shan’t I take my lessons in there to study ?”

“No. You’d better stay in the sitting-room—I guess.”

Miss Hale’s “guesses” were decisions. Her niece, picking up her school-books, crossed the hall to the lamp-lighted corner near the open fire and began her evening’s tasks.

Buff followed her, of course, and it may have

been his playful presence that made application so difficult. He seemed possessed by a spirit of restlessness and would frequently rise from the rug, to poke his cold nose into Edith's palm, beseeching her attention to himself. Then he would sit upon his haunches and throw his head back, sniffing the air viciously, as when he suspected an enemy near.

His behavior was peculiar and distracting, and his mistress fancied that he had missed his supper ; so led him back to the kitchen, where Eli was just tying his woolen tippet over his ears, preparatory to his walk villageward. A letter lay upon the table, whose superscription he was closely scanning. The envelope was unsealed and the gruff carrier fully intended to master its contents before it reached the person for whom it was designed. Yet he already surmised its message and felt no malice toward anybody. He would have been truly amazed if his purposed action should have been construed as impertinent, and himself considered it but part of his burdensome care of the household he served.

As he knotted the tippet and pushed his moleskin cap tight over that, he nodded toward

the pan of uncracked nuts and inquired, testily :

“Like to have me smash my fingers off at them 'ere, I s'pose?”

“Yes,” meekly replied Maria, carefully polishing a teacup.

“Any other little job to tackle when that's done?”

“Well, there are—some raisins to stun ; an' I 'lowed, maybe, you'd like to help slice the citron and wash the curr'n's. The last time, as 'tis——”

“Sh-h-h !” admonished Eli, jerking his head significantly, and she stopped short. There stood Edith close beside them, looking with unfeigned surprise at the store of good things spread out on the wide shelf.

“Why, Maria ! making fruit cake again ? I thought you and aunty had finished your year's supply long ago. Before Thanksgiving, indeed. What's on foot ?”

“I am !” answered Eli, with clumsy facetiousness. Then as he passed out he called his wife after him and the girl heard them whispering loudly together in the entry.

This was out of common in their simple house-

hold, where nobody had any secrets, and it puzzled her. But she was not unduly curious; and, having satisfied herself that Buff had had a good meal offered him though he declined to eat it, she returned to her books.

Miss Comfort had gone up-stairs to her own room and would not be apt to come down again till time for evening worship. The complete quietude of the place should have helped Edith to study, yet a second time she found herself unable to do so. Buff still kept close to her, lying heavily upon her skirt and frequently lifting his head to lick her hand.

It was a relief when she heard her grandfather's call :

“My dear, aren't you coming to sit with me? It's very lonely without you.”

“I wanted to, but Auntie Comfort seemed to think best not.”

“Did she? Well, well! I suppose she fancied that I—never mind. Come near. Close to the fire. I want to talk with you, grandchild.”

Whenever he said “grandchild,” Edith knew that matter of import was to be discussed; and when he did not at once begin the talk she reviewed the events of the past few days and her

own conduct, wondering if in any or what respect she had failed. For, like all the household, she, too, realized that minister's folks are candles set on a hill; and, as Eli often lamented:

"It's powerful hard on short-sighted human natur' to keep one's light a-burnin' constant."

Yet she could recall nothing especially worthy of censure, and her grandfather soon sank into a profound reverie. She, also, fell to dreaming, but her visions were of the happy sort that come to all young folk; while, judging by the inexpressible sadness of his fine countenance the old man's were somber retrospect.

At last, Buff grew quiet and went to sleep, still with his ungainly body curled upon the hem of his mistress's gown. The trio were thus motionless as well as silent when Miss Hale entered, to place a lamp upon the "Bible table."

The father roused and looked up, half-guiltily:

"Why, daughter, is it nine o'clock already?"

"It has 'warned' to strike the hour," she answered, regarding the pair before her critically.

Then they heard Eli stamping his chilled feet in the kitchen beyond; and presently the whole family had arranged themselves in their ordinary manner for the last worship of the day.

That night it seemed to Edith that there was a strange atmosphere in the familiar home ; and that everybody around her was looking positively unhappy. She was more convinced of this when, at parting for the night, her grandsire laid his hand upon her sunny head and repeated the blessing of Moses. After which he put his arms about her and stroked her cheek caressingly.

"So, to-morrow you will be sweet sixteen ! You have been a good child, my Edith. Indeed, the blessing of the Lord will shine upon you in all your wanderings. Good night, good night."

Then he took his bedroom candle and went quickly away, while Aunt Comfort handed the girl hers. She was never a demonstrative woman, yet that night she, too, drew her niece into a momentary embrace and kissed her tenderly.

"Father is right, dear. You have been far more of joy than care to us. I hope your coming new year may be full of peace and happiness."

Suddenly, a lump rose in the girl's throat and choked her. She glanced hastily through the kitchen doorway and saw Maria actually wiping

her eyes upon her apron ; while Eli had folded his hands behind his back and stood warming himself before the fire in an attitude of utter dejection.

“He looks as if he were going to a funeral !” thought Edith ; and depressed by the gloom of everybody around her, she darted a hasty kiss toward her aunt’s cheek and hurried away to her own cosy room, wondering, as she went :

“I would like to know what mystery’s afoot ! One would think I were on the eve of departure for some unknown land ! yet it’s only another birthday that is coming. Is it so solemn to be sixteen instead of fifteen-and-ninety-nine-one-hundredths ?”

Just then Buff, who had been banished to his bed in the lean-to, set up a dismal howl, and a moment later she heard Eli’s indignant remonstrance with the unhappy dog.

This was so natural and commonplace a sound that it promptly restored the girl’s spirits and she was soon asleep, and quite unconscious of the startling fact that Miss Hale, with her two helpers, spent almost all that night toiling in the kitchen.

Ordinarily, ten o’clock saw the last light ex-

tinguished in the parsonage ; but the old time-piece on the shelf struck one before Maria took a monster loaf of cake from the oven and remarked :

“There ! that’s the last, and it’s morning ! Well, well, well, poor innocent ! I wonder if she’ll ever again taste decent food !”

“Hush, Maria !” retorted Miss Hale, sharply.
“Get to bed, at once.”

CHAPTER II

AN ASTONISHING ANNOUNCEMENT

AFTER her walk before breakfast, it was Edith Hale's custom to call at the post-office for her grandfather's mail, which was usually in excess of that of any other villager except Squire Saunders.

When she appeared before the little window among the glass pigeon-holes, on her birthday morning, the postmaster greeted her with a look of surprise, and the exclamation :

"Bless my soul ! I didn't expect to see you here to-day ?"

"Indeed ? Why not ? It's just grand out-of-doors ! The air is full of sparkling crystals and the trees are covered with them till they are fairly dazzling ! I hate to go indoors. The skating will be fine and I mean to get up a party to go down to the pond this afternoon. May Letty join us ?"

"Hum ! I don't know. We're pretty busy,

these days. But seein' it's the last time—I guess I'll strain a point an' spare her—that is——”

Fearful that the hard taskmaster would withdraw his permission, Edith ran through the back door of the office and general store, into a dingy kitchen where a delicate, stoop-shouldered girl was washing dishes.

“Oh! Letty! it's my birthday, and I'm going to celebrate by asking all the girls and boys to come and skate with me this afternoon. Your father says you may come, too! Won't it be lovely?”

“You're lovely, any way, girly!” returned the dish-washer, affectionately, “and it would be fun. Though do you suppose he meant it?”

“Of course he meant it. He said something about it's being the last time, but that doesn't matter until the next time comes. Then we'll hope he'll be willing again. I do wish he didn't make you work so hard.”

“I suppose he thinks it's his duty. I wouldn't mind so much if I didn't care about an education. Well, I guess I'm not intended to have a very good time in this world and I must be content.”

"Oh! you dear old dismal! Why so doubtful of good? It's Deacon Squibbett's fault that you are denied the chance you ought to have. His, and—Letty Squib's herself! So there! 'tis out! and if it's treason, why treason it is. But, Letty, child, why don't you spunk up? With your fine mind you've a right to an education and I would just demand it. Say that you must have it and you'll get it. Fact."

Letty smiled sadly.

"You don't know my father. He loves a dollar better than—his own child, I guess. But never mind. I'll get a little pleasure out of to-day and let to-morrow take care of its own trouble."

"Exceeding wise young woman. If you'd only stick to that principle you'd be as jolly as I am. But, Letty, it is true. You're so afraid of your own father that I believe you make him more stingy—beg pardon—than he would be otherwise. Did you ever tell him you wanted a college course?"

"I should as soon think of jumping off the roof!"

Edith tilted her gray Tam sideways and critically regarded a frost-covered shed visible through the window.

“ Well, since the roof isn’t high and you’re dying for want of out-of-door exercise, I should call that an excellent plan. It would set your blood circulating faster and warm the cockles of your heart. I wonder what heart cockles are, anyway. If Shakespeare were alive I’d write and ask him.”

“ Edith Hale ! how you do go on ! you say the oddest things, and more of them in a minute than I would in a day. How can you be so merry, when—even if father is—I should be broken-hearted.”

“ Upon my word ! Are you, too, like the rest of the folks, struck riddle-mad ? Last night everybody at home talked enigmas, and this morning the few I’ve met have done the same. What is it all about ? But, never mind. I’m off. Grandfather will want his mail and Auntie Comfort will look volumes if I’m late to breakfast. After that’s over and my work done I’ll run around and see the other girls. You speak to anybody who comes in about the skating, too, will you ? Two o’clock, sharp ! Good-by.”

Edith hurried back into the office and Letty watched her go, with a sudden mist blinding her blue eyes.

"If it's true, what will my life be without her!" she exclaimed, in sorrowful foreboding.

Much richer than with her, had she but known it. For as the minister's grandchild passed once more through the store and found its master alone, she was inspired to free her mind concerning the aspirations of her timid schoolmate. Going to where the deacon stood, straightening a row of tin cans, she laid her hand upon his rusty shoulder.

"Deacon Squibbett, please send Letty to college."

The request might have been a bomb, exploding at his feet, he staggered backward so suddenly.

"Send—Letty—to—college! Are you crazy?"

"Not a bit. As sound as a nut. A good nut. But you'll be if you don't. That girl has the finest mind of anybody in Sissmissit, and she'll make the old town famous if you give her a chance."

"Why, Edith! Why—E-dith! How you do talk!"

"I know it. Always to the point, Grandpa says. But I can't help it. Somehow, I feel as if I must show you how it looks to me, just

this once. If it does any good I shall be forever thankful, and if not—why, then it will be your fault.”

The merchant finished his task and returned to his place as postmaster behind the pigeon-holes. It was against governmental rules for Edith Hale to follow him into that sacred precinct, but she did, and he did not reprove her. He took up a bundle of letters and re-sorted them idly, while she waited for him to speak.

“She ain’t never said anything to me about it,” he finally observed.

“Of course not. She was too afraid.”

“Afraid!” he exclaimed, testily. “Did she get you to do it for her?”

“No, indeed, Deacon Squibbett. She doesn’t dream that I would dare do such a thing. But it just came into my mind that, maybe, you didn’t realize how brilliant a daughter you have. Do you know that she has been studying nights, and coming whenever she had a chance to Grandpa to get his help in her Latin and Greek? Yes, sir, Greek. Greek with a capital G!”

Apparently, for the time being, Edith forgot the waiting birthday breakfast and the min-

ister's desire for news; for she quietly seated herself upon a convenient table and resumed her argument:

"I wish you could hear my dear old grandfather talk about her knowledge-hungry soul, and then see him look at me over his specs. I'm not knowledge-hungry at all. I hate a book—that has sums in it; but I do love folks. I love Letty as well, I believe, as if she were my own sister. I suppose that's because you and papa were such chums when you were boys. Don't you?"

The other looked at her questioningly. But there was no sophistry in the frank young face opposite him, and Edith had spoken out of the full conviction of her great heart. She knew that her dead father, whom she had never known, but who had always seemed to her as a saint, had been raised with Silas Squibbett and had loved him truly. She had always fancied that the attraction between herself and Letty was but a survival of their parents' boyish friendship, since there was as little in common between the two girls as there had been between the two men—after they became such. All the other young people stood in

awe of the stern, close-fisted deacon, but she had never feared him at all. She feared nobody, greatly, and now all her interest was roused on Letty's behalf.

"Do you know what I'd like for a birthday present from you? For I shall never be just sixteen again and I shall be disappointed if I don't have lots of presents to-day. I've heard somewhere that ministers' folks always did feel as if the world belonged to them and I'm ministers' folks, you know. Well, please give me a promise for a present. That you'll let Letty have her wish. It's unfit for such a girl as she to do all the housework, and take in mill-work on those old—beg pardon, new—overalls and jumpers you sell. It's like feeding Eli's pigs out of Grandma's wedding china pitcher as I did once. I didn't break the pitcher but I demeaned it, somehow."

"Huh! No daughter of mine is demeaned by any honest labor. That mill work you sneer at has brought in a pile of money."

"Isn't that good! Then Letty has really earned her own way. But I must go. I'm a great talker, Maria says, yet for once I'll have to follow Grandpa's sermon rule: 'Say a thing

and leave it.' I've said the thing and I'll leave it with one more—please! That's the end. Good-by."

She gathered up her bundle of papers and the one letter belonging to her and went out so hastily that the postmaster could do no more than watch her and think how bright and bonny she looked.

How like her father, too! He remembered that very toss of the lad's head when they had used to play hookey and go fishing down in the willow pool. Hmm! Well, well! So Letty was considered brilliant, was she? The girl must be eager for learning, indeed, if she'd walk all that mile between home and the parsonage, in the dark and after a day of hard work, just to pick up a few hints from the scholarly old clergyman. He wished he'd had a son; and he thought a woman's place was in her kitchen, keeping house for her folk.

True enough, he was all the family Letty had, and his maiden sister would be glad to leave her lonely farm and come into town to housekeep for him. He guessed students went to college in the fall, not midwinter; and—well, he'd think it over and, maybe, talk to

Letty about it. He wished she'd had spirit enough to tackle him regarding the thing, herself; still a wholesome fear of a father was scriptural and Edith said that nobody had dreamed of her interference.

“Gay little Edith. There'll be a big hole in the village afterwards.”

Meanwhile, the intercessor passed swiftly along the snowy path, humming a merry tune as she went, until she reached the turn of the road by the railway station, whence she must ascend to the parsonage, and was hailed by the telegraph operator, who was agent and baggage-master all in one. He was reputed to be the laziest man in the township and to have tumbled into his office by sheer inertia. Years before, when the railway was built, his shoe-shop had been found a convenient halting-place. It was therefore transformed into a station and an obliging man came over from a neighboring hamlet and taught Reuben Hill the rudiments of telegraphy.

This saved Reuben a deal of trouble. He was well paid for his land and he didn't have to move. He never did move if he could help it, no matter what the exigencies of his official

position. He now congratulated himself that his discovery of Edith's approach would save him a quarter-mile walk to deliver the message which had just come over the line. If he had possessed but a trifle more energy he would have informed her what the telegram stated, since it concerned herself, but there was no need. It took all the breath he wished to waste to halloo :

"E-dith—Ha-a-ale !"

"Yes. Do you want me ?"

He wouldn't have called her if he hadn't, but why trouble to say all that ? It was easier to hold up the yellow envelope, significantly, and he did so.

"For me ? A telegram ? Why—what can it mean ?" she cried, feeling a bit startled by the uncommon circumstance.

Mr. Hill stooped and put the envelope into the mouth of his dog, his frequent and intelligent messenger, and the animal promptly waddled along the road and dropped his burden in the girl's path.

She laughed and lifted it.

"Good fellow ! You ought to receive your master's salary instead of himself. All right, Mr. Hill, I'll carry it."

He stayed her by a slow wave of his hand. Then he shouted :

“ You can fetch the money down next time you come ! ”

“ Money ? For doing your own work for you ? The envelope is marked ‘ Paid ’ ; so there’s nothing due you, unless you take it to the parsonage yourself. Oh ! you funny Mr. Hill ! ”

But she was already far up the slope as she said this and if he heard her he was too indolent to resent or retort.

There was neither indolence nor lack of curiosity in Edith’s own manner as she entered the breakfast-room, where the family were already at the table, and the girl looked hastily toward Miss Comfort expecting a reprimand.

None was forthcoming, however, and all eyes were immediately turned upon the telegram she carried.

Yet when Mr. Hale had received and read it, he merely passed it onward to his daughter in silence ; and his grandchild, as well as Eli and Maria, had to bear their disappointed curiosity in silence.

The same depression which had hung over

the family, at the previous supper, enwrapped them still; and even the girl's enthusiastic description of her interview with Deacon Squibbett elicited little attention. Though the Doctor did remark:

"Well, I don't know of any person to whom a college course will mean so much as to that motherless Letty. I hope her father will decide favorably, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that your last act toward your playmate was one of greatest kindness."

Just then Miss Comfort shook her head again, warningly, and, rising, asked that she might speak with her father in his study.

In desperation at the state of things, Edith turned upon Maria for explanation:

"Do tell me what it is that makes you all act so queer! Things aren't a bit natural, and if it all comes of being sixteen, I hope I'll never be that again. I mean, of course——" she laughed.

"You never will be!" returned Eli, as he departed stableward.

"You ain't looked at your presents yet, girlie, an' there's a pile of them. They're all on the table, yonder, by the window," observed Maria.

"Oh! how pretty! and what an odd selec-

tion ! A leather hand-bag : for a girl who never goes out of Sissmissit. A shawl or rug, is it ? A writing tablet, three pairs of gloves, handkerchiefs—well, they're all lovely, and I never had so many. But why a satchel, Maria ? ”

That good woman had already escaped from questions sure to follow, and it soon occurred to the girl that it would be a rudeness further to express surprise at her aunt's selections.

The day passed swiftly, the afternoon especially so ; and when the twilight warned the skating party that it was time to think of home, Edith was first to lead the way.

With amazing readiness the entire company seconded her motion, nor did they even stop in the village at their own homes, as she expected, but merrily declared that they would go all the way.

“ Why, that's jolly, of course, but I'm not afraid,” said the girl.

“ Don't suppose you are ; but can't we go up and pay our respects to the Dominie ? ” demanded Derby Saunders.

“ I—suppose—so,” she answered, slowly. She knew her grandfather's hospitality. At

that hour any visitor to the parsonage would be asked to remain for supper, and what would Aunt Comfort say if she brought home such a company as this?

Her schoolmate saw her dilemma, and laughed at it.

“Don’t you fear, Ma’amselle Sixteen! we’re not intending to intrude our hungry selves upon anybody. But we’ll go along, just the same. My! what a lot of times we’ve climbed this old hill together. It won’t ever seem the same to me again.”

Was it possible that something like a sigh escaped the lips of mischievous Derby? Edith wouldn’t have believed that but for all the other curious things she had observed that fateful day; nor was she greatly surprised that, presently, a spirit of seriousness fell over the whole group; nor that the little which was said during that walk home should be of a melancholy tone.

Yet if not surprised, she was indignant; and at the parsonage gate she turned and reviewed her escort.

“I don’t know what’s the matter with all the people to-day, but I’ve had enough of gloom.

Do, all of you, try your utmost to be just jolly to-night. I'd like to get a little bit of fun, at least, out of this solemn business of having a birthday."

"All right, Edith! we'll carry on enough, to-night, to make you remember us forever!" cried one laughing girl, whose eyes, somehow, did not look as mirthful as her lips.

Then one part of the mystery was explained. For no sooner had Edith opened the front door than did she discover how evidently her mates had been expected.

In the long dining-room beyond the hall a table glittered with Aunt Comfort's best china and glass, while the candelabra that were used only upon festive occasions graced each end of the shining damask. Piles of plates and napkins denoted that a goodly number of guests were looked for; as, also, did the heaped trays of sandwiches, bowls of salad, and snowy sugar-coated cakes.

"Oh! this is what it all meant, then! A surprise for my birth-night! Welcome, welcome, everybody, and pardon me because I tried to drive you home when you persisted in coming!"

With that she ran to throw her arms round Miss Comfort's neck, who received the embrace more cordially than might have been expected, while Eli, peering in through the kitchen doorway, demanded :

"How happened it you didn't guess? Why, I walked all the way to Mary Foster's last night, a purpose to give the word, how we wanted the young folks to tea to-night; an' she must have stepped lively to have notified them all."

"Indeed, I did! and they needed no second bidding," answered Mary. "Isn't it just too sweet of your Aunt Comfort, Edith! I fancy we'll be jolly enough to suit you, after all!"

And they were. Wraps and skates were promptly bestowed in a corner of the wide hall, and then the girls followed Edith to her own room to make themselves tidy for their feast; while the lads were guided by Eli into the lean-to, where they adjusted similar matters by the aid of a tin wash-basin and a roller-towel.

Then the fun began; and for five hours it held full sway; every member of the household joining in, even the old Doctor, who was never so glad as when among his boys and girls,

and who seemed to them to be but another like themselves.

At the end of the evening, however, the merriment died a sudden and complete death. With the stroke of eleven, an hour later than most Sissmissit parties dispersed, Letty Squibbett ran to her young hostess and hugging her ecstatically, burst into tears.

“Oh! Edith! It was perfectly splendid of you to speak to father and he says I may, and I can’t bear it, I can’t bear it, I can’t!”

This enigmatical outburst, hurled at Edith without pause or punctuation from the careful Letty, seemed a signal for general mourning.

“Oh! good-by! good-by! You’ll write, won’t you!”

“I shall just hate this old town after you’re gone!”

“I won’t say it now, I’ll meet you at the station. Yes, I will, no matter how early!”

Something clutched the heart of the birthday girl and her eyes opened widely. Then an indignation seized her, that all these others should know what evidently closely concerned herself before she did. Yet she was too proud to demand an explanation in their presence and

resolutely controlled herself until the last of her friends had passed beyond the wide front door and Maria had closed it behind them.

Then she turned toward her grandfather, whose face had lost all its happiness, and who silently took her hand and led her across the hall into his own study.

“Oh! Grandpa, what is it? What dreadful thing is to happen? I think it's horrible, the way you're all treating me. Everybody else seems to know——”

“Don't, my darling! Maybe we have been mistaken, but we have followed your parents' directions——”

“My parents! Why, they died years ago.”

“All the greater reason why we should be faithful to our trust. It has seemed right to disclose nothing till the end came. It has come. To-morrow morning early, very early, you will start upon a long journey. To your maternal relatives.”

The old man's voice broke. The announcement had been most difficult to make, for he was ringing the knell of his own happiness, as it were.

“My—maternal—relatives! Why, Grandpa,

they are away off in Southern California !
Three thousand miles from here !”

But Doctor Hale did not answer. He had turned away his own sorrowful face that he might not see the misery in hers.

CHAPTER III

IN A TRAVELING DINING-ROOM

A FURIOUS snowstorm was raging as the local train pulled out from Sissmissit station in the dawning light of the following morning.

Like a person in a dream, Edith Hale had risen and dressed by candlelight; had tried to eat a portion of the tempting breakfast Maria had prepared; had clung to her grandfather's neck in a half-realized parting; and now sat silently by her aunt's side upon the dingy red cushion of a common railway car.

For a time she tried to pierce the blinding flakes which dashed against the window beside her; but failing to see through them she closed her eyes with the intention of just thinking it all over. Instead of that she quietly went to sleep and Miss Comfort observed this with satisfaction.

“Poor dear! It will rest and brighten her more than anything. It is such a blessing to

be young and healthy. Troubles are not lasting, then."

Indeed, when the girl awoke, she found that she had already dozed during all the distance between Sissmissit and Boston, and what had roused her had been her aunt's touch upon the shoulder, with the words :

"Wake up now, dear. We have to take another train here."

They had traveled away from the storm, and when they stepped into the pretty parlor car of the express for New York the sun was shining brilliantly and Edith found herself far more cheerful than she considered at all proper, under the circumstances.

The rich and comfortable furnishings of the carriage, the composed bearing of the people occupying the soft chairs—which bespoke them frequent travelers, the novelty of the scenes through which they passed, all tended to raise spirits which could never be greatly cast down, even by heavier trials; and again Miss Hale smiled quietly to herself and with an almost envious resentment.

"It's the one who stays behind who suffers most. Edith is as true a girl as ever lived, but

—the new life will take the place of the old, and speedily. I'm glad it's so, of course, yet how we shall miss her !”

There was very little talk between them. In a few minutes, at the close of the last night's party, the grandfather had explained everything. The necessity for this journey and its unexpected suddenness, as well as the manner in which it was to be made ; and Comfort Hale was not the woman to repeat any statements.

Indeed, it seemed to the inexperienced Edith that it wasn't any time before a second change was to be made, and her aunt remarked, as she gathered up her belongings :

“This is New York. We must take a carriage here and cross to Jersey City, where I expect we will meet Second Cousin Frederic.”

In reality, of course, there had been several hours of rapid journeying, and there was now noticeable considerable nervousness in Miss Hale's manner.

“It's one thing to sit quietly in an easy chair and be carried through unfamiliar places, but this is quite another !” she ejaculated, as they stepped down upon the platform in the great station amid the conflicting shouts and direc-

tions, and found themselves borne along amid the stream of outgoing passengers, and heard the roar of the mighty city beyond.

"How horribly confusing it is! Why don't they keep still just for one minute, then I could think!" returned Edith, clinging to Miss Comfort's arm, big girl though she was.

Then somebody laughed and remarked:

"If you wait for New York to keep still, even one second, you'll have a pretty considerable spell of waiting!"

The stranger's comment nettled the elder lady and restored something of her composure. In her younger days she had not been altogether ignorant of the world and she reflected that if they were to get across the town and meet the afternoon's outgoing fast express, from another monster station, they had no time to lose.

"Well, we can't stand here, gaping about us! We'll have to make good time, as it is, for that delay a few miles back may lose us your western train, even without any further hindrance."

"If it did—what would we do?" asked Edith, anxiously.

"Needn't cross that bridge yet," returned the lady, already dickering with a hackman as to

his rates. It would have been contrary to Miss Comfort's thrifty habits to have engaged any service, no matter how dire her need, without attempting to reduce its cost. Yet even as she talked she was handing her parcels to the man and pushing Edith into the carriage, to expedite matters.

Then followed what seemed to the imprisoned patrons a breakneck ride over the city streets, in which hairbreadth escapes from collision with other vehicles were momentary happenings; and both fairly caught their breaths when the cab rolled briskly forward on to the deck of a ferry-boat, just as the latter pushed out into the stream.

But the cold salt breeze which swept up to them from the bay was refreshing and the interval of quiet between shores restored their nerves to a partial calmness. So, when the further dock was reached and the cabman opened the carriage door with the remark: "Here we are, ma'am!" Miss Hale was almost herself, and settled with him to wait her own return as composedly as she would have argued with Eli himself.

It was well for her that she did have this

momentary respite; for upon entering the great waiting-room and looking critically around it, she missed the familiar face which she had been anticipating with perfect security.

Then she hurried to the ticket office and inquired :

“Has the through express for Chicago left yet?”

“No, madam. Will leave in just ten minutes.”

“Ten minutes! We’re in time for that, then, my girl. And it is likely Frederic will come right away. I suppose a minute before would be all right, yet he was New England raised and he oughtn’t to run such chances.”

“But we have ten whole minutes more, Auntie Comfort! Let’s forget worries and just—just love each other. It will be so long—Oh! auntie, I don’t want to go! I don’t, I don’t! I am afraid. It didn’t seem so bad last night, when we talked it over, but now—this glimpse of the world frightens me. There are so many, many people, changing all the time. I was never afraid of much before, but I’m afraid now. Do take me back with you. I’m sure my parents wouldn’t mind if they could see how much I dread it!”

The words fairly tumbled over each other in her eagerness, but they produced no relenting on Miss Hale's part. The present anxiety lest Edith's promised escort should not arrive outweighed all lesser, or soberer, ones. The girl's ticket had been bought, her sleeper section engaged, over one hundred dollars of good government money had been put upon this venture, and it was quite too late to think of withdrawal.

"No, no, child. That is impossible. He'll come. He must. He wouldn't disappoint us this way, without warning. He was New England raised, I tell you. Just keep your eye on that door yonder and I will mine on this side. That way we'll be able to see him the minute he appears. You are to wave your handkerchief, remember. That was the signal agreed upon."

This effectually prevented any useless sentiment upon the young traveler's part, and it maybe, therefore, was a good thing. Though she always afterward looked back to those few moments wasted in a vain watchfulness with a keen regret.

"So much may be said in ten minutes, and, indeed, I had so much to say!"

Miss Hale held her watch in her hand and stole frequent glances toward its old face. She could trust that better, she fancied, than the great timepiece on the station wall which heralded for all beholders the outgoing and incoming of the thunderous trains.

"All—aboard—Chicago—flyer! all aboard for Chicago and the West! a-l-l-a-b-o-a-r-d!"

"Your train, darling!"

"But he hasn't come! I can't go alone!"

"He must have overlooked us. He must be on board! You'll find him there!"

"Come with me, aunty! oh! come!"

"As far as I'm allowed, my child—my precious Edith!"

In that supreme moment of parting, Comfort Hale felt as a mother losing her only child and the barriers of her stern self-control all gave way in the stress of unwonted emotion which swept over her soul. Few who knew her, least of all her niece, would have dreamed it possible that the minister's daughter should so yield to her grief, but yield she did, and in her amazement at the sight Edith herself turned comforter and begged:

"Don't, Aunty Comfort, don't! you will be

ill ! And you've all that long way to go back alone !”

Neither realized the absurdity of this remark, since the girl's own outward journey was to be so much longer than the other's, and keeping her arm about her aunt's waist Edith led the way toward the uniformed officer, beside the railed off portion of the station platform beyond the waiting-room, and asked his guidance.

“This way, miss, and you've not a moment to lose. Here, porter !”

A negro, also in blue and brass, appeared, caught up Edith's various parcels and marched off toward a distant car of the great train which seemed to the New Englanders to be miles long. But at length the “Tuscarora,” was reached, the girl was helped up the steep steps and hurried to her section, whence she could glance through the closed window toward poor Miss Comfort standing without, sad and watchful.

Neither of them remembered Cousin Frederic just then ; and it was as well for their peace of mind that they did not ; since at that very moment there was reposing upon the desk of Reuben Hill a second telegram stating that Frederic Stowe's own departure for the west

was indefinitely postponed, but that he had a friend who expected to leave New York for the same trip and, if his relatives in Sissmissit pleased, he would put them in communication with this friend, and more to that point.

Reuben had been a little tired, when the despatch arrived, having already had one for the Squire to deliver that day, and—it wasn't his business, any way, to go up to the parsonage and unsettle them all again just after they'd got the ticket bought—sent clear to Boston for it, too—and all. Just like Fred Stowe, anyhow. Never did do a thing at the time he said he would and I shouldn't think the minister's folks would have trusted him nohow.

So the western "flyer" pulled noiselessly out of the great station and left Miss Comfort weeping on the platform, while the motion was, at first, so imperceptible that Edith did not know they were moving, until the long lines of other cars on other tracks beside their own began to roll backward, as it were, and presently they came into sight of city streets, of isolated dwellings, of the wide open country.

Then the truth came over her with a rush and almost turned her faint.

"Tickets, please !"

The girl produced the long, curious strip and handed it up to the conductor who, seeing her quite alone, looked a brief surprise and went onward down the aisle.

Soon he came back and she ventured to ask him, perhaps for the mere comfort of having somebody speak to her :

"What time will we get to Chicago, please ?"

"Six o'clock to-morrow afternoon. If we're on time," he added, cautiously.

"Six o'clock to-morrow night ! That's thirty hours, about ! Oh ! I wish Cousin Frederic would come, though I shouldn't know him if he did."

A lump rose in Edith's throat and for fear that she should cry she resolutely fixed her attention upon the strangers around her and on the varying landscape visible through the car window. She was not crowded for room ; nobody, apparently, having taken the other half of her section ; so she made herself comfortable upon one of the broad seats and disposed her satchels, baskets, and bundles upon the empty cushions facing her. The baskets contained luncheon, put up to last her whole trip across

the continent, and she felt that the heat of the car would probably spoil it. So when the smiling porter came swinging down the aisle, looking as if he wished to serve her, she spoke to him :

“I wish you’d please put these things in some closet or store-room. I sha’n’t want more than this little basket and this one bag before we get to Chicago.”

The negro laid his hand upon the breast of his spotless duck jacket, which he had already substituted for the blue uniform worn at the start, and assured her with profound regret, that :

“Would be most happy to oblige you, lady, but that is against the rules. We’re not allowed to put anything in our sto’-room, lady, which is for the bedding only, lady. Anything else I can do for you ? Or your folks ? Whenever you need me just ring and I’ll come.”

Then he passed on, and Edith wondered :

“Where am I to ring, I should like to know ! I see no bell.”

While she was speculating upon this she recalled with what hungry eagerness the porter had eyed the little purse she held in her hand,

and having been prudently trained she decided that it would be safer in her pocket, out of sight.

After a time, there was a brief halt of the train, and what seemed a deal of sliding and backing, with the coupling of more cars, and a shout from somebody that this was: "Philadelphia!"

Most cities of her native land were best known to Edith by their historic incidents, and she cried out, rising:

"Oh! I wonder if I can see Independence Bell. There! What a silly I am, of course!" and she sat down again, peering through her window at a most disappointing scene of rafters and girders and a wide expanse of station roof.

Then followed an incoming rush of more traveling strangers, till the village-bred girl felt as if all the world were journeying; and onward once more they went into the deepening night and the open country.

As the daylight faded the lights of the car streamed out, and a negro in white attire came shouting through it:

"Supper! First call! Supper—is—served—supper!"

He bawled his announcement directly in Edith's ear and she clapped her hand to it. At home, so hurried had been her last preparations, there had been very little talk concerning the details of her journey, even had the stay-at-homes been travel-wise enough to instruct her. All things had been left to the experienced Cousin Frederic, and since he had not appeared she was at a loss how to act.

But as many of the people in the car rose hastily, and leaving their belongings in their various sections, passed swiftly toward the rear of the train, she decided that they must be going to accept the waiter's invitation. He had seemed to include herself so especially that she felt it would be rude not to follow the crowd, yet she found the long passage backward, through car after car of the great train, a rather trying matter, and was constantly more impressed by the sight of such a multitude en route for somewhere.

However, her homesickness was leaving her, and her eyes were keen to catch every novelty; and by the time her swaying, uncertain journey came to an end in the food-fragrant dining-car she realized that she was very hungry, indeed.

Here the crowd and rush were worse than ever. Apparently every traveler had left home unfed, and the struggle for seats seemed to the young New Englander most ill-bred and vulgar.

"I'd rather go without my supper than fight for it!" she murmured, shrinking into a corner by the narrow entrance.

"And so you probably will," commented a voice at her elbow.

Edith looked up into the face of a gentle, smiling old lady, who seemed as amused by the spectacle before them as the other was disgusted by it. 'Push'! is the American watchword. But are you alone, child?"

"Yes, madam," answered Edith, with stately precision.

"Then, I'll get my husband to look out for you, too. He's forward securing seats for ourselves. Ah! here he comes. Is there room, Hubert?" she concluded, addressing the white-haired gentleman who wedged his own way back to them.

"Yes. But I had to give a big tip to secure them. This system is becoming a perfect outrage. First the company swindle us by their rates; we pay three dollars a night for sleeping

in a hole in the wall, and the caterers take all we have left to furnish us with second-class food. But, come on, my dear. I've begun my annual grumble and will keep it up, I expect, till we reach the other side."

As he talked they waited for some more hungry folk to file past them, into the crowded car and out again, with disappointment on their faces; but his glance had rested for a moment upon the young girl beside his wife who laughed at his ill-temper, remarking:

"I suppose you will, dear. You always do, and I fancy it prevents your getting nervous. This young lady says that she is alone, and I presume she is as hungry as everybody else. Could you find a seat for her, too?"

"Please don't trouble, sir," began Edith, but he waved his hand.

"Don't mention it. A pleasure, I'm sure. The best way, I think, will be for you two to take the places already secured and I'll sit alone at some other table."

"Oh! indeed, madam, I couldn't allow that. I'll go back. I'm not so very hungry and I have a lot of cold lunch, any way. It would make me unhappy to inconvenience you."

The lady answered quietly, yet firmly:

"Much better he than you, my dear, to be alone here. Come. It is all quite right."

There was no questioning this gentle, dignified decision, and Edith was very grateful for the momentary care. So she followed her new friend to the very further end of the car, that swayed fearfully and made walking even more difficult than through the forward ones.

"It's the last on the train, you see; the tail of the kite that catches all the motion, and we're running very rapidly now," remarked the lady, herself sinking rather suddenly into the seat which seemed to rise off the floor to meet her.

Edith bumped into the corner of the little table, to the amusement of the pair which occupied its further side—a couple of commercial travelers, as Mrs. Levering's experience recognized them—and they laughed audibly.

But not for long. Edith was utterly unconscious of them and of everything save the fear that she had jarred against her frail protector, while the latter gave the young men one stern glance which effectually brought them back to the bearing of gentlemen.

It was all exceedingly interesting and de-

lightful. With intuitive kindness, the old lady suggested :

“ Suppose you let me do the ordering for us both. I fancy I can select a meal that will not give us a bad night’s rest, for I’m an old traveler and have learned to be wary of fancy dishes.”

“ Thank you, I wish you would,” responded the girl gratefully.

Once, on a memorable trip to Boston, she had dined at a restaurant, but under her Aunt Comfort’s guidance. Even then she had wondered at the dexterity of the waiters, though the floor they walked was stationary and their room for passage ample. Here it was like treading a rocking boat, and there seemed not an inch of wasted space. The white-aproned servitors brushed each others’ bodies constantly and their loaded trays were held high above their heads to escape a destructive collision. Their movements kept her fascinated, till Mrs. Levering touched her elbow and recalled her attention to the food before her.

“ We must eat and give way to the next lot of people, my dear,” she remarked ; her eyes noting with admiration the regularity of her

companion's features and her beauty of coloring ; but she also thought, with astonishment: " Why in the world is so young and inexperienced a maiden allowed to go about alone ? yet she looks well-born and carefully trained and she is almost dangerously pretty."

Now there had been gradually stealing over Edith's healthy appetite a curious indifference to the well prepared dishes ordered for her. A moment ago, it seemed, she had been ravenously hungry. Now—the things didn't look very nice. There was a suspicion of too much grease about the delicately broiled beefsteak, and the lemon in her cup of Russian tea was determined to jump up and down in a most annoying manner.

She wished the car wouldn't swing so much. If it would keep still just for one moment she'd like to try what that queer mixture of clear tea and lemon juice tasted like. She was thirsty if not any longer hungry ; and—how dizzy she was !

Then she realized that she must get out of that atmosphere, at once—without the slightest delay. She was dimly conscious that not only Mrs. Levering but the commercial travelers were observing her with critical commiseration,

and managing to rise from her seat she staggered into the narrow aisle, brokenly murmuring:

“Beg pardon, but—I must—be excused!”

It was a vestibuled train, with double plate glass windows, from which a too solicitous corporation had carefully excluded every vestige of fresh air; but Edith looked yearningly toward the car door, wondering if she could reach it before—

A hand upon her shoulder. A black, obsequious, yet sternly watchful face close to her own.

“Wait a moment, lady!”

Surprise allayed, for a moment, the distressing nausea of “car-sickness.”

“Well—what? Quick! I want to get out!”

“All right, lady, soon as you’ve paid. Orders is orders, and I’m right sorry, I’m sure, but, if you please, lady——”

“Paid! what?” gasped the miserable girl, seized again by that deathlike feeling.

“Your supper, lady.”

“My supper! I haven’t touched it, and I thought—I—I——”

Then all things swam together, in her vision; and dishes, tables, strangers and white-coated waiters became one indistinguishable jumble.

CHAPTER IV

AN INCIDENT OF TRAVEL

WHEN Edith Hale recovered her sense of things about her she was in the dressing-room of the sleeper nearest the dining-car, resting upon a narrow seat with her head against an open window frame. The fresh keen air of the January night fanned and refreshed her, while above her leaned the sympathetic face of Mrs. Levering.

“ Ah ! my dear. That is good, you are better, I see. It was the motion, and you are unaccustomed to traveling. I know nothing more horrible, physically, than car-sickness. But, here, take this ; it is a specific—as far as anything can be. Then we'll get back to the ‘ Tuscarora ’ and our own sections and you must go to bed at once. That will be the best cure for you, and by morning you should be quite acclimated, so to speak.”

Many pitying glances were bestowed upon the

white-faced girl, whom the old lady so gently guided backward, or forward, through the train; and those who had traveled much easily comprehended the cause of her pallor. But it added greatly to Edith's distress, now that she was recovering, to reflect that she had probably spoiled her benefactress' supper for her, and that she had also made a scene in the dining-car.

As she sank into the seat which already looked familiar to her, she begged earnestly:

"Please, please, go back and finish your meal. I am so sorry I was ill. And that man! I didn't know about paying—I supposed it was all——"

"All in the bill, eh? Well, it ought to be, but it isn't. There is nothing in the bill that can be kept out of it. The company delight in extras; but it's an outrage, and a swindle and——" grumbled Mr. Levering, who had followed his wife and was now looking over her shoulder, with eyes that twinkled mirthfully and lips that pouted like an angry child's.

"Come, come, Hubert. That's enough. You go back and finish your supper. Send a waiter in with my tea and a bit of toast. I think—your name, my dear? Edith? I think Edith would

be wiser to abstain altogether until morning. Then she will be able to laugh at her to-night's misery. I am glad our stateroom is large enough for three. If you should feel very badly, my dear, you may share that."

Then the lady touched an electric button in the side of the car, and the porter, who was busy making up a berth at the other end of the sleeper, looked and nodded his head; though there was no disrespect in the motion.

"That means he'll come to us next. It's a busy hour, always, for the porter. Everybody demands his service at the same moment; but all in good time, and I know it's the rule to attend to any sick people first. Come across the aisle, if you can, and we'll sit in this empty place, while he fixes your bed."

Ill as she was, Edith watched with interest the deftness with which the porter accomplished his task, and thought how comfortable the transformed seats appeared. But she wondered why he also let down the hanging shelf above and made up another bed directly over her own. Who was going to occupy it? and how narrow the space between the berths!

Again Mr. Levering, who seemed always to

appear just in time to voice her unspoken questions, loomed up in the aisle beside them and demanded, fiercely :

“That upper berth taken?”

“No, sir. Not this trip out.”

“Why are you making it up? Don’t you see that this young lady is ailing and needs all the air she can get?”

“Yes, sir. ’Spect she do. But the Company’s rule, sir. Mus’ make up every berth in the car, whuther they’s takened or not. Has to ’bey orders, sir.”

The gentleman thrust his hand into his pocket and drew it out again, suggestively exposing its plump palm to the porter’s gaze. A seraphic smile spread over the ebon countenance and with the remark :

“I ’spect I might consult the conductor about it, sir, just seein’ the young lady—er——”

“Exactly. Consult as promptly as you can; and after everybody else is through with you, take a hand at our stateroom, will you?”

“I’s done done that a’ready, sir. I most gen’ally does fix the stateroom first.”

He did not add that he did so because the occupant of it, for the time being, was commonly

a person whose purse was ample, since its cost rendered such a state of things a necessity.

But Edith was too ignorant of traveling usages to understand this little by-play; though in the innocent generosity of her own heart she would have found nothing surprising in the fact that two strangers, such as the Leverings, should interest themselves on her behalf to such a degree.

She realized little beyond the fact that, all at once, she was inexpressibly weary; and that she longed for nothing save to creep behind the curtains of her section and lie down upon that neatly made bed. For the porter had soon returned from his supposed parley with his superior, the conductor, and had swung the upper berth back into place against the ceiling, so that the young traveler had, if she had known it, far greater luxury of space and air than fell to the lot of the other occupants of the sleeper.

“Now, my dear, just lie down and sleep. I’ll look in at you once or twice before I settle for the night, and if you need anything don’t hesitate to press the button and summon the porter. He’ll speak to me for you, too, if you wish. Good night. You’ll be all right in the morning.”

With a cheery smile, Mrs. Levering helped her young neighbor to her berth and when the bright head had sunk upon the pillow, bent down and lightly touched the pale cheek with her motherly lips.

"Oh! how good you are to me! You must have lots of daughters of your own to have learned just how to comfort other girls so well!"

"Never had a daughter in all my life, so I get what good I can out of caring for other people's," answered this Good Samaritan, blithely, as she dropped the curtains behind her and shut the tired New Englander into a tiny world of her own.

"I don't believe I'll sleep a single wink! I don't suppose I really ought, for what if something happened! Eli said he wouldn't dare to shut an eyelash on board a sleeping car, 'cause if he was to be hurled into Eternity so sudden, he'd like to be hurled with his eyes open! Poor Eli! dear, dear home folks—I wonder what they are doing—is grandfather alone in his study—is——"

Visions of familiar things mingled with the rumble of the train and the occasional shriek of the whistle, as the engine dashed through some

unimportant town without stopping; and this she fancied was Buff barking at a neighbor's dog. She must go out and call the rascal in, after a minute, when she could get herself aroused.

But it wasn't her pet which waked her; it was the sun shining through the window whose curtain she had forgotten to close.

For a few minutes longer she lay still collecting herself and listening to the odd sounds all around her in the sleeper.

From somewhere a woman's voice, querulous and exacting, was calling for the porter and berating that long-suffering creature because she hadn't slept a wink all night. From another point came the sonorous tones of a masculine snore; there was cheerful talk and laughter from those who had rested well, and a constant brushing by her section curtain of persons passing to and from the little lavatories at either end of the sleeper, which did general service as dressing-rooms for all its occupants.

Then Mrs. Levering's voice:

"Miss Edith! are you awake? are you quite well this morning?"

"Yes, thank you. Awake and feeling splendidly. I didn't mean to go to sleep at all, but I

must have done so as soon as I lay down. Shall I get up now?"

"I think so. The dressing-room happens to be empty just at this time and there's no telling how long it may be. So it's your opportunity."

Half an hour later, looking as fresh and bright as if homesickness or car-sickness were things unknown, Edith returned to her section to find it already in order for the day's occupancy; and her kind friend sitting upon one of its cushions, herself also spotlessly trim and dainty.

"I see, my dear, that you too have learned the secret of keeping tidy while traveling, and that is to wear the plainest, least dust-attracting attire. Yet I wonder how, since you say you've been about so little."

"Not any 'how,' I guess. Just happened that my ordinary clothing suited the case. All my things are made the plainest way. Auntie Comfort hates frills and fol-de-rol. So it's her good sense has served me. Did you rest well? And will you tell me what I should do about my breakfast? I—I am ashamed when I think of my blunder last night; yet auntie told me decidedly that I was to get a cup of hot milk or even coffee this morning."

Thereupon Mrs. Levering imparted much needful information, and added the comforting words :

“Don’t think of that incident again. It was a perfectly natural mistake under the circumstances. My husband attended to the matter and will look after you as long as we are together. Then you can repay us, at your leisure.”

“Thank you so much. But I feel ashamed to face those people again, who saw me blunder so.”

“Nonsense, child. If they remember you at all it will be with simple pity for your mischance, but more likely they will have forgotten the circumstance altogether. No individual is of much account among such a multitude of strangers as are on this train with us.”

“But you were a stranger, too ! Yet you are caring for me as if I belonged to you.”

“Oh ! well. That’s nothing. I like it. Come. There’s Hubert beckoning to us. We shall find the dining-car a pleasanter place this morning, because it will be less crowded. There are many still asleep in their sections in this sleeper and there are several sleepers beside ours. All right ? Ready ? Don’t leave any valuables in

your berth. It is unsafe, for one never knows who may prove dishonest."

"All my little valuables are in here," laughed Edith, shaking her small purse lightly; "except my long ticket, and that is in a pocket of my jacket."

Breakfast was well served and enjoyed by all the party, who had a place to themselves, whereat Mr. Levering read his newspaper and sipped his coffee as composedly as if he were at his own table in the home he had left. But he glanced now and then across its top toward the dark-eyed girl, with the yellow curling hair, and wondered how it came about that she should be traveling alone and with a ticket covering the distance clear to the Pacific slope. He hoped his wife would find out, and give her plenty of good advice. Then he demanded:

"How does it seem to be whirling along at this breakneck speed and tackling tough mutton chops at the same moment? We're used to it, Penelope and I; for this will be our eleventh winter in California, and our twenty-first journey overland. If we live to finish it!" he concluded, cheerfully.

"Oh, oh! Is it possible! Then I don't

wonder you've learned how to do it. But what would Eli say ! 'Zach-a-rias,' in capital letters, I guess."

"I must get you to tell me about 'Eli,' and 'Aunty Comfort' and all your home friends after breakfast. My stateroom is very pleasant and I invite you to make me a little visit. We shall have nearly all day together, and possibly——"

But the lady did not finish her sentence. It had occurred to her that they might, possibly, have much longer than this one day, yet she did not wish to raise false hopes on Edith's part, and she left her abrupt remark unexplained.

Soon after that they were settled alone in the sunshiny stateroom at the end of the "Tuscarora," Mr. Levering having betaken himself to a chat with some gentlemen in another compartment, and taking out her knitting-work, Mrs. Levering leaned back among her cushions and suggested :

"Your story, my dear. I feel as if I knew you well enough already to make that request seem natural and not idly curious."

"Indeed, I am only too glad to tell—the very, very little that there is. I am Edith Hale, born and brought up in the New Hampshire village of Sissmissit, whose minister my

grandfather has been for forty years. I have always lived at the parsonage with him and Aunt Comfort, his daughter. Besides us three were Eli and Maria Johnson, Sissmissit folks, who've lived with grandpa almost as long as he's been there. The neighbors say that they two are more our folks, than we are ourselves; but it seems silly to talk of such humdrums. I'm afraid I'll tire you."

"Should you be tired of hearing about us?"

"Why, no, indeed! I should be simply delighted."

"Go on, then; and I'll even up afterward."

"All right. It's good to find somebody I can speak to about home. It takes away part of that exiled sort of feeling; or as it seemed at times, yesterday, as if the old life that has been all my sixteen years were unreal and the only real part was this dreary traveling alone. That was before you were so kind to me.

"Well, besides Aunt Comfort, grandfather had one son, my father. He developed consumption when he grew up and went to Southern California to be cured. He did get well, or thought he had, and he married my mother there. She was a Californian, a descendant of

one of the old, old families. I believe it had once been rich but was no longer so. He took her home to Sissmissit, and they both died within the next two years. They left me to grandpa to bring up, and I never dreamed but that I was to stay there always. Yet I was not. It was my father's will, and, I presume, my mother's, too, for she signed the paper they showed me, that I was to be trained in real New England fashion until I was sixteen—that was for father's sake; and when I was sixteen, for my mother's, I was to go to her people in California. I was to be told nothing of all this until the time came, lest it should unsettle me and interfere with my studying. They needn't have worried, though! I didn't care for the study, anyway."

"But how came they to send you alone? And do your Californian relatives expect you?"

"I believe they do. Grandfather wrote, as soon as it was decided when I was to go. But that part was very sudden, it seems. They had meant to wait till spring, or till a good chance came of my having company. New England folks do, sometimes, go so far away from home and they hoped to hear of somebody. Then,

all in a minute, Aunt Comfort had a letter from Second Cousin Frederic Stowe, saying he was going across the country and he'd remembered about David's girl and would look after her if they liked. Then came a telegram that he would leave earlier than he expected; so, at the last, everything was in a terrible rush. We started yesterday morning before daylight, with the ticket that had been bought and sent to us by a Boston friend, and we thought we'd meet Cousin Frederic in the Jersey City station. He didn't come though, and so much money had been spent for it, I had to use my ticket and come alone and do the best I could. I think Aunty Comfort still hoped, when she left me, that her cousin would appear somewhere or other upon the route. I hope he will, too, but I've given up expecting it, we're so far along. So—that's all. And I'm so glad I met you and that you were kind to me. But I do dread the change at Chicago. After that, aunty said that she believed I had nothing to do save sit still until I reached San Diego."

"Well, well! That is, indeed, an experience. Have you been much away from Sissmissit?"

"Never anywhere, except once to Boston."

“Then you should enjoy this journey famously. And you’ll get on all right. The world is full of kindly hearts, and one has but to show oneself also kindly to make plenty of friends. I think we may be able to help you make the change you dread, and I had hoped we might be going all the way together. But it seems not. Hubert will strike north for San Francisco, and later for Pasadena. He combines a little business with his holiday; and now it is right you should hear about us, too; for mutual confidences beget good feeling. We are only a childless, well-to-do old couple with plenty of aches and pains now and then. Our home is in New York, but we don’t like the winters there. So, after the holidays, we cross the continent to California, and stay till April. Then home, a few weeks’ rest, and off again to some seaside or mountain resort. Regular Americans, you see, whose home is a convenient spot in which to pack and unpack trunks. But now, my dear, I’m going to write some postal cards, to friends behind; and if you like to do the same I’ll get them mailed for you along with mine.”

Edith did wish to write, and thoughtful Miss

Comfort had provided several ready addressed cards for use along the journey ; and as she saw Mr. Levering coming down the aisle to his own stateroom she took her friend's remark as a polite dismissal and retired to her own section. But she had scarcely taken out her pencil before there came a sudden shock and jar that threw her from her seat forward upon her face, then a deafening crash and a chorus of shrieks and cries from everybody about her.

“ A collision ! A collision ! ”

With that terrifying shout in her ears poor Edith buried her face still further in the cushion, believing her end had come.

CHAPTER V

SURGEON'S ASSISTANT

SICK with horror, Edith waited—to die. Then she began to realize that she was not suffering at all, save from her fright, and ventured to lift her head.

All around her people were hurrying out of the car, their white faces gradually growing calmer, as they found that after the dreadful crash the train came to a standstill, and that, in the “Tuscarora” at least, there was nothing worse than dislodged luggage and badly shaken passengers.

Then she heard a voice calling, anxiously :

“Edith ! Edith ! Porter ! Somebody—help !”

She recognized the cry as Mrs. Levering's, and hardly daring to look toward the stateroom answered :

“Yes ! I'm all right ! Are you hurt ?”

“Come quickly !—come—come !”

Leaving her scattered belongings wherever

they had fallen the girl bounded forward, but she quite expected at each step that the floor would give way under her feet. It did not seem possible that any car could sustain such a shock and remain intact. But, save the displaced furnishings, there had been no injury, and she climbed safely over these obstructions to the cosy compartment at the end.

Mrs. Levering was on her knees beside her husband who had been thrown heavily to the floor and who lay with his eyes closed and apparently unconscious.

“Oh! what has happened?”

“He was standing when the blow came. I can't lift him! Get me help—please, please! Hubert! Hubert! Speak to me!”

Edith's well-trained muscles stood her in good stead. She cast a hasty glance about, but by then the sleeper was quite deserted, save by they three.

“Wait! Don't struggle so. If you'll move aside I can do it! Please!”

“You? You can't, yet he mustn't lie there. His arm is doubled just backward—broken, I fear, but it's his head—Oh! my dear, God bless you!”

Even the girl herself did not know just how she accomplished it, yet the strength was given her, and the self-improvised gymnasium in one corner of Eli's barn bore fruit at that critical season. In a moment more she had pushed and lifted the helpless man upon the wide lounge and had begun to loosen his necktie and collar. The concussion had broken the window and through the aperture streamed a reviving breeze. Also, in their high school at home, there had been a class in "First Aids to the Injured," and its lessons had been much more to Edith's taste than the pages of her geometry or Latin grammar.

She recalled them all now and, finding her so capable, the anxious wife gave way in the narrow space and left the few ministrations possible to the girlish hands. Even then there flashed through her mind a thankful memory of the slight service she had herself been able to perform, on the night before, to the helpless stranger who was now so efficiently helping her.

"What a confirmation of the creed of 'Lend a hand'!" she thought; and aloud exclaimed: "He is opening his eyes! He isn't dead—he isn't!"

Mr. Levering regarded his wife with a puzzled

air and then blinked away the water which Edith was so generously applying to his temples, and, incidentally, splashing over all his features. Then he yawned and shivered slightly, and finally gained strength to ask:

“Why—what is it? Penelope——”

“Oh! you old darling! I thought you would never speak to me again!” sobbed the gray-haired wife, pushing Edith aside and bending over her husband in anxious tenderness.

“What?”

“A collision, I guess. But this car is still sound. The jar threw you down and——”

“Ugh! ouch! broke my arm, I reckon!” he groaned, trying to lift the useless member, and finding it behave quite contrary to custom.

“Hmm! Well, better my arm than my neck or even my legs. They’re all right, aren’t they? Feel of them and see. Either of you hurt? Eh? No? Then we have great cause for thankfulness.”

The color that had returned to the jovial countenance for a moment again gave place to a deadly pallor and again the sufferer lost his senses. The blow upon his head, as his wife had feared, had been but little short of fatal.

"Oh! for a doctor! There should be plenty on the train. There always are, or have been," wailed Mrs. Levering, completely unnerved by the suffering of her husband, upon whom all the affection of her childless life was centered.

"If there is one, I'll find him!" cried Edith and hurried out of the car.

All thought of herself and her inexperience was forgotten, and she ran to the crowd forward, imploring:

"A doctor! Is there a doctor here?"

"Anybody hurt? Eh? Where? Way back in that sleeper? Why, we were just congratulating ourselves on a smash-up without any injuries!"

It was the sleeping-car conductor who first responded to her appeal, recognizing in the girl a passenger under his especial care, and he promptly aided her search for a surgeon. Fortunately one was, or had been, on board, and he was soon discovered by the official. Together the three hastened back to the "Tuscarora," and the conductor explained to Mrs. Levering while the physician examined her husband's injuries:

"Freight train on the wrong track. The usual blunder of some incompetent, and a blessing no lives lost. A general scare of the forward passengers, worse than these here, and some fainting. But nothing serious—marvelous escape—sorry about this case. Going all the way across, weren't you? Thought I heard the old gentleman say so. Eh, doctor? Arm broken, head contused, and—what? a rib, too! Bad job, that."

"Can you help him, sir? Oh! can you?" pleaded Mrs. Levering.

"To a degree. It would be much better done when you reach Chicago."

"But that's hours away. Even if we go on again at once."

The surgeon turned to the conductor:

"It's a lucky thing I'm placed just as I am. On my way home from a convention of surgeons in New York, with a bag full of fresh appliances. While they're fixing up damages ahead can you have this car switched off for a few minutes?"

"Yes."

"All right. Do it. Send me a man of sense, that knows how to use his hands—or

stay—Who has managed this case so far?" he finished, turning to Mrs. Levering.

She pointed to Edith, and the surgeon smiled.

"Good enough. She can help me with the arm, and the rib I'll tackle later, when you find the man. I'll go for my valise and then, madam, you'd better take a bit of medicine and step outside while I make your husband as comfortable as I can here."

Edith Hale had never seen anybody work as this unknown surgeon did, and she had never been so thankful for the little knowledge she had gained from her "Aid" studies. Under his directions she rapidly prepared bandages from the sheets brought her, and despite the crowded space, and the general confusion outside the stateroom, both Mr. Levering's injuries had been attended to long before the broken train had been cleared of its débris and was ready to resume its way.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Levering had secured plenty of help for herself in the matter of telegraphing ahead for a room in a hospital, countermanding previous orders, and so on. Nor did she forget Edith's affairs in the stress

of her own misfortune ; and when the journey had been for some time quietly resumed she spoke to the girl and explained what she had done.

“ You will probably miss your train at Chicago, on account of this delay, but I have wired to secure you a section in the next outgoing one. The conductor tells me that there will be no extra expense, owing to our unfortunate accident ; and I have also sent a despatch home to your people. I feared they would read of the collision and be unduly frightened. At Chicago I will have a trusty railway employee go with you to your new car and see you comfortably settled. After that, as your aunt said, all you have to do is to stay in your place and get all the comfort from your trip that you can. Just think, my dear, that during your long ride from ocean to ocean you will have crossed fifteen states and territories ! Isn't that a wonderful experience for a village-bred girl ? ”

“ Yes ! But not so wonderful to me as that you should think so far ahead for me, a stranger, and in the midst of all your worry stop to take such care of me.”

“ My child, you have helped us, too, very,

very much. I shall not forget that. Oh ! if we were only at our journey's end ! ”

“ But, Mrs. Levering, I hate to bother you, yet I can't let it pass. The money you've spent for me, in the telegraphing, and my meals, and paying the porter about the upper berth, and all. If I return it now, while Mr. Levering is asleep, won't it disturb you less ? ”

“ But, Edith, I'd rather you did not mention it. Just accept it as a trifling service Hubert and I were glad to render. As you were glad to serve us.”

A flush rose on the girl's cheek. Miss Comfort had strict ideas of business matters and dollars represented their full value in the Sissimissit atmosphere. The niece would have to account to the home folk for all her expenditures and she felt that it would be difficult to explain matters to their satisfaction.

“ If Auntie Comfort were here and could see, she would understand. But I'm afraid she'll be angry with me for letting you. She's very proud and correct.”

Mrs. Levering had observed a slight movement in the stateroom, where the surgeon now sat with his patient, and she was anxious to go

back to her post. The matter seemed very trivial to her, in comparison, and she answered a trifle impatiently :

“Oh ! well. If you are particular. The meals were just a dollar each ; and Hubert had ordered our dinners ahead. That will be three ; and the telegrams each way—hum. Probably as many more. They are long distances and even operators take advantage of mischance to make an extra fee. How Hubert would grumble about that, if he were able ! But call it five dollars. That's near enough to satisfy your aunt, I presume. And one last morsel of advice before I forget it. If you have a bit of time, after you've gone from one station to the other, at Chicago, I'd get a bill changed into small money if I were you. Or maybe I can find enough for you among my husband's. We always carry a lot of small pieces ; for one has to do a great deal of feeing or tipping during the long journey, and it's convenient to have the change. It seems an imposition, but in your case, a young girl absolutely alone, it will be wise for you to make a fast friend of the porter. There's nothing will do that so surely as dimes and quarters judiciously expended.”

The lady rose as she spoke and with her eyes fixed upon her stateroom door did not observe the consternation in the countenance of her companion.

Edith had done some rapid thinking and a sum in mental arithmetic that would have delighted her late instructor by its promptness; and though she mechanically took from her scantily filled purse a crisp five-dollar bill and thrust it into the indifferent palm of Mrs. Levering, her heart sank with dismay.

“Five whole dollars in one single day! And Auntie thought that this amount would be ample for my whole week’s trip! That is for my food, and she little dreamed there’d be any other expense. With all the luncheon she put up for me she thought I would be extravagant if I spent even so much. Why, all I have in the world, above my ticket, is twenty-five dollars—or, indeed, but twenty, now! Oh! this is dreadful, dreadful!” thought the astonished girl.

But Mrs. Levering had passed forward to her disabled husband and Edith could not have spoken of her trouble to that good friend, even under happier circumstances. There was nothing for it but to bear the blow in silence; and after

awhile things began to right themselves in the young traveler's mind and to assume their just proportions.

"Well, it can't be helped. I suppose Aunt Comfort did not know how expensive traveling really is; and that Mrs. Levering has so much money she doesn't care. After all, the great thing is to be thankful I was not killed; and the dear old lady has surely taken a deal of trouble to arrange everything for my comfort and safety. If I'd made blunders in Chicago—and I never should have thought about that changing my section or train—it would have cost much more, probably. It might even have taken all I had, besides the fright and danger of being alone at night in an unknown place. I dread it, terribly, even so; but I'm learning pretty fast! Oh! for a glimpse of the old study at home! and for a chance to run in and tell Grandpa all about it! How he would stroke my cheek, with his soft tremulous hand, and how gently he would bid me: "Never fret yourself, child, over mistakes, but go on and do better next time.' Ah! yes. But the next time can't come, in this case! The five-dollar bill is hopelessly gone."

When the call for dinner came, remembering that it had been paid for and being decidedly hungry Edith went to it alone and "ate her money's worth." Her New England thrift would have compelled her to do so, now she had become enlightened, even if she had not found herself in such fine appetite. But the car-sickness no longer interfered with her enjoyment and she already felt thoroughly at home in the train.

Mrs. Levering's dinner was sent in to her stateroom, where she fed her husband what little he would take and nibbled at her own portion. But it was quite evident to Edith that herself and her fortunes had already sunk into a small place in the lady's mind, since this new great trouble of her own had come upon her.

It was therefore a rather lonely afternoon that the New Englander spent, and it was long after dark before that stage of her journey ended, and her fellow passengers, with an air of great relief, began to pick up their belongings, and get themselves into trim for leaving the car.

The porter and his wisp-broom were everywhere in demand, and there was a general pack-

ing away of traveling caps and veils, with a reappearance of well-brushed hats and bonnets. It was all very interesting to watch until a sudden sense of what it meant made Edith feel a homesick dread of desertion steal over her.

"They all seem to know just what to do and where to go, except—poor me! Even the Leverings are getting ready and she's so terribly anxious about him that she can't remember others. I don't blame her, though, and I wish I could help her."

"Chicago!" bawled two voices, one from each end of the sleeper. An announcement scarcely needful to make, since nothing but the terminus of a long journey could have produced so complete an evacuation of the car the instant it came to a halt.

A moment later, after the crowd had dispersed, a stretcher was hastily brought in. Upon this, men in the uniform of hospital attendants promptly and deftly placed Mr. Levering. His pallor increased under the distress this moving cost him, but he tried to smile kindly upon the eager girl who approached as nearly as she dared, and who called after him in the cheeriest tone she could command:

“Good-by, good-by! I hope you will soon be all well again!”

The wife had eyes and ears for Hubert only, and her farewell, spoken backward over her shoulder, was a simple:

“Good-by, Edith! We’ll meet again, I’m sure. Keep up your courage and you’ll be all right!”

It was good advice; yet, at that moment, courage was the one thing utterly wanting in Edith Hale’s heart, as she saw her transient friends depart, to leave her standing alone in the great empty car.

It was black night outside and a storm was raging; more fiercely, even, than the one in which she had left Sissmissit. A day and a half in the “Tuscarora” had made it a temporary home, from which to go away was a fresh trial. Even her luggage which, at one time she would have thought nothing of carrying, now appeared to confuse her by its amount and to be a burden beyond her strength; while the porter, who might have helped her, had already disappeared with the belongings of a passenger whose tips had been liberal—while her own had been none.

Presently, some women car-cleaners came in,



EDITH PASSED DOWN THE STEPS

to begin their usual task of making ready for another run, so that further delay was out of the question.

So, loading herself with her parcels, Edith passed out and down the steps of the sleeper into the racket of a night scene in the great station of a mighty, unknown city.

CHAPTER VI

A STRANGE SECTION MATE

FOR a moment, the girl stood dazed and confused. Then she heard a voice close beside her evidently addressing herself; and rallying her wits she turned toward a man who might have been their porter's double, so like were the pair in attire, in soft suavity of speech, and even—to the New Englander's unaccustomed eyes—in features.

“If yo’ please, lady, is you all de one what’s takin’ de Santa Fé overland? De young lady what was telegrafted erbout by de yuther lady what was in de collision? Cayse, if yo’ be, des gi’ me dat truck an’ I’ll tote it yonder. We gotter catch a ’bus right smart if we makes it. Dis way, lady, if yo’ please, dis way!”

The smiling negro had taken all her luggage from her before she realized that she had given it up, and as he now turned and rapidly threaded his way among the people, down the platform,

toward a flight of steps, she followed him at her utmost speed.

“Well,” she thought: “that’s a relief, anyway! He may be stealing it, though I think he can’t be. He wouldn’t have known of Mrs. Levering and her despatch if he weren’t somebody belonging to the railroad. But—goodness! How he travels! Though he looks around, now and then, to see if I’m coming. Bless that dear, thoughtful woman’s heart! I almost felt hurt that at the last she paid so little attention to me; but how silly I was! I had no claim upon her and yet, even in the midst of all her anxiety over her husband, she has prepared my way for me like this. Even Aunt Comfort would think the telegram money well spent if she could see me now!”

Though the active porter kept looking back toward her and nodding his head encouragingly, she had fairly to run to catch up with him. But after they had crossed a long platform at the top of the steps and come out into the storm, he paused abruptly and gazed about him with an air of great concern.

“’Pon my wo’d, lady, dem ’buses has all done gone away!”

“ ’Buses ? Stages, you mean ? What are all those, in that line yonder ? Don’t they go to that other station from which my next train leaves ? ”

The brilliant electric lights showed a number of heavy vehicles, besides a long row of empty cabs and hacks. These, as well as their drivers, who hallooed loudly for passengers were powdered with the falling snow, and the noise was even more confusing than that they had left in the station below.

“ ’Spect if yo’ wants to catch yo’ train, bes’ way is fo’ to take a kerridge ; yes, lady, if time—— ”

“ I do want it, of course. Well, call one, then. Why do you wait ? ”

It was amazing with what promptness her attendant singled out and summoned the vehicle best suited to their needs, according to his own statement ; and as he bundled her property inside and helped her to follow it, Edith did have a momentary feeling that she was doing a hazardous thing. One of the few warnings which her aunt had given her had been to beware of trusting strangers, and yet how could she help it ?

However, as the porter climbed to a seat beside the hackman, it was reassuring to hear the order given :

“To the Santa Fé station, double quick !”

A few moments later, after she had been bounced and tumbled about in the roomy interior of the carriage, till she felt that she was black and blue, it came to a sudden halt, her guide sprang down, flung open the door, and cried :

“He’ we are, lady !”

Edith had caught the spirit of haste and leaped to the pavement, catching up her parcels as she did so, and breathlessly demanding :

“Which way ? My train ?”

“Dis way, lady ! All right, ’Zekiel ! I’ll see yo’ later !”

They fairly flew over the short distance remaining, and then the young traveler was again in the midst of a crowd of hurrying strangers each laden with the impedimenta of a prospective journey. A long train of many coaches—all sleepers—so far as the girl could see, stood upon the rails beside the platform. To each car was another porter with his hand at his cap rim most of the time, while he assisted

his charges up the steps and called the name of his especial carriage after them.

“ ‘La Joya’, section six. Dat’s yo’s, lady. He’ we are. Hello, Ephra’m ! dis young lady, she’s de one telegrafted erbout. She goes clean froo. Take good care of her, Ephra’m.”

“ All right, Mistah Jeff’son. I’ll special do so.”

The new porter, whose duty it would be to serve her during the rest of her journey, bowed profoundly and allowed “Mistah Jeff’son” to help the girl to find her section and to place her luggage beside her. Then he waited, cap in hand, inquiring solicitously :

“ Anything mo’ I can do fo’ yo’, lady ? ”

“ Nothing, thank you. I am very, very much obliged for all your kindness. Sure this is the right train ? the right car ? I’m not used to traveling and——”

“ I can see dat, lady, but yo’s all right. I’s sure erbout dat. But, it’s off now an’ the ker-ridge, lady, I spect you done forgot erbout it. An’ my se’vices, lady, jus’ a trifle, lady——”

With further falterings of heart, Edith opened her purse, and inquired : “ How much ? ”

“ Well, lady, seein’ de haste what was ne’ssary, an’ de damage to de team, scusin’ de trouble,

erbout four dollars might pay. Fo' myself, why—whatever de lady pleases;" and with his finest manner the extortioner bowed before her.

The sleeper had rapidly filled. All about her farewells were being spoken and friends who were left reluctantly parting from those who were to go. There was every sign of instant movement and, even had there been plenty of time, Edith felt herself powerless to contest the other's imposition. He had served her well, and with what grace she could she extended toward him a second of her crisp five-dollar bills, and remarked, earnestly :

“Do go. You'll get carried off. Pay the man his four dollars and keep the other; that ought to pay for a whole day's work and you were only a little while.”

“Thanks, lady, an' I'm sure I hope yo'll have a pleasant journey an' reach the haben of yo' destination feelin' scrumptious, lady. Good-by!”

With a run and bound he was off the already moving car and Edith was left to recover her composure as best she could.

“Well, I suppose I ought to appreciate the only good wish and farewell I've received, even

if it did cost me so much! Yet that's hardly fair, either. What would I have done without those two helpers? Oh! how difficult it is to be just, when—a body has only fifteen dollars left! and with a journey hardly begun, it seems to me, looking at my time-table map!"

Now was Maria's reward. There had been a long, long time since dinner, and having wholly outridden her car-sickness, Edith's appetite almost frightened herself. So as soon as the people about her had gotten so far settled that she could give over watching them, she opened one of her lunch boxes and took out a glass jar of shredded chicken. The care with which it had been packed had kept the food sweet and moist, and never had anything tasted better. But, as her hunger became satisfied thoughts of the kindly hands which had served her in this matter, as in so many others, obtruded; and with a sigh that was almost a sob, the exile leaned her head against her cushions and closed her eyes, picturing to herself the home scene at that hour.

"Funny Maria! She never wrangled with Eli, trying though he was. But I can see her this minute, standing in the middle of the

kitchen floor and making those horrid faces toward his back, as he went out. It was her only way of letting off her own anger, but how absurd it was! How ashamed she was when I caught her at it! I wonder——”

She never knew what. The heat and comfort of her position, added to her fatigue, overcame her and she fell fast asleep; with her lunch still open about her and her precious purse lying on her lap.

She was awakened by a vigorous shaking of her shoulder and looking up saw a man in blue uniform, with a glitter of gilt about it, and a small lantern hugged in one arm demanding:

“Tickets, please! And I say, young woman, I advise you to keep such things out of sight;” pointing to her pocket-book.

She roused with a start.

“Why, have I been asleep? I didn’t know it.”

The official laughed genially.

“That’s all right. Better call the porter and have your berth fixed. Everybody will want him in a minute; and, by the way, are you occupying this whole section alone?”

“I—suppose so. My cousin didn’t come.”

"Name, please."

"Mr. Frederic Stowe."

"Hmm! Stowe. Stowe! That's not right. This was taken for Mrs. Eastman and companion. You might be the companion?" he concluded, tentatively.

"I might be, but I'm not. Oh! I hope there's no serious mistake! Am I not on the right train? The one for San Diego?"

"That's all right. But somebody has blundered—as usual."

"They said I'd miss the one I should have taken, on account of the collision."

"Didn't, though. The flyer wasn't so long overdue and we waited. On a long trip we can easily make up a little time. Besides, there were a lot of passengers booked for the Slope and to be left by us would mean a day's delay. But—Hello, Snyder! Have you found a place for your party yet?"

"No. She claims this. So does her ticket."

Another Pullman conductor, an official quite distinct from the train conductor, had entered "La Joya" and joined his confrere beside Edith. They held a brief consultation, then Snyder turned to the girl and explained:

“Old lady in another sleeper has engaged this section, both berths, for herself and companion. Seems it was also engaged for you. Her companion hasn't come; neither has your friend. Have to ask you to share quarters. Cars are crowded full, every place taken. Else would try to make some other arrangement. Hope it'll be all right?”

“Oh! yes. I suppose it will, I mean, of course it will; but I do hope she's nice. It's such close quarters and such a long ride. But—yes, yes! I'll do whatever I'm asked. Certainly.”

Yet the girl waited in some trepidation the entrance of her new companion, upon whose amiability would depend so much of her own comfort during several days to come. Nor did her courage increase when she saw Snyder reappear, assisting a decrepit old lady down the car-aisle, while behind them walked a porter bearing more luggage, it seemed, than would fill an entire section, exclusive of Edith's own belongings.

With a groan that was really a snort, and palsied shakings of head and hand, the newcomer fell into the seat facing Edith, and immediately exclaimed:

"Oh! Ugh! Ah! I can't stand this! I can't ride backward. I never did. You've stolen half my section, at least give me my choice of seats."

"Certainly, madam. But there has been no stealing. Any mistake made has not been of my fault."

Whereupon, with slightly heightened color, the younger traveler packed together her scattered parcels and rose to give place to her new acquaintance. It was not a promising beginning; and after the old lady had been helped to arrange herself afresh in Edith's vacated place, there followed a deal of labor in bestowing her luggage, without entirely crowding the other's out of the section.

When, at last, the octogenarian was settled and the two porters who had been engaged in ministering to her had departed, she fixed her spectacles on her nose and coolly regarded her young vis-a-vis with keen scrutiny. Then, in the forcible manner with which she uttered all her words, she hurled a question against Edith's ears.

"What are you doing, traveling alone?"

"Why—traveling alone. At my grandfather's wish."

The answer was out before Edith realized that it savored of disrespect; also that it was not strictly true. She resented the curiosity of this aged person as she had not at all that of the gentle Mrs. Levering, to whom her thoughts reverted with regret. She amended her reply, by the explanation, more courteously given:

"I mean that I am journeying by grandpa's authority, though he had no thought I would have to do so alone."

"Hmm! Got a temper of your own, haven't you? Well, I'm glad you're truthful. I hate a liar. I wouldn't be shut up in a Pullman section with one during the best part of a week, not for a farm. And I know what I'm talking about. I'm a farmer."

"Oh! indeed?" asked Edith, politely.

"Don't look it, do I? Well, I am. Own a farm in nearly every Western state and get cheated on the whole of them. I go my rounds, though, once a year. I'm on my rounds, now. Going to look after my orange interests in Southern California. Oranges and olives. Like olives?"

Whatever might be this odd old lady's other infirmities there was nothing amiss with the

working condition of her tongue. Her words seemed to chase each other out of her mouth and she waited for no replies ; those which her young companion did volunteer falling, apparently for the most part upon unheeding ears.

“ ‘The lame and the lazy are always provided for.’ I’m lame, you see. I lost my attendant—I’m continually losing them—this one ran away and got married without rhyme or reason. Sent me a note saying she’d like to go shopping in Chicago, and I was simple enough to let her. Bought herself a husband, it seems, after I bought this section and paid for it, with her ticket and my own clear through. Though I’ve got a stop-over. At Las Vegas. Going to the Hot Springs to duck myself and shake off rheumatism. Ever have rheumatism ? Suppose not. Too young. But you will, if you live long enough. Have anything ? Come of healthy stock ? Everything in stock. Look prime. Look as if you’d been well reared. Suppose you wouldn’t object to acting as a companion to me during the rest of the trip ? Eh ? Pay you well. Must have somebody, and that ingrate went and married. Hauled her all the way from Milwaukee, too. Don’t know me yet, do you ? I’m

Mrs. Cadwallader Eastman, of Milwaukee. Pay the heaviest taxes in that city. Philadelphia born and bred. That accounts for my executive ability. Never outgrow heredity. There. I've told you enough about myself. Who are you?"

Edith explained with a brevity strongly contrasted with her new acquaintance's volubility.

"Hmm! Well, your grandfather's is a different creed from mine! but by many roads we shall all, I trust, reach the same Heaven."

With her last remarks a wonderful change spread over the old woman's withered countenance. The nervous glitter of her eyes softened to a gentleness that astonished Edith; and after sitting absolutely motionless for a moment, save for the incessant tremulousness of her frame, Madam Eastman suddenly leaned forward and touched the bell button. Then, when the porter appeared, she demanded, with another sharp contrast of manner:

"Well, what's your name? You fellows are as much alike as blackbirds, but have to distinguish you, somehow."

"My name's Joe, lady!"

"Oh! that was the name of the porter on the 'Tuscarora,' and he was very nice!" exclaimed Edith, eagerly.

"'Spect so, lady. Dey's a power of us named Joseph, an' we's mostly nice, lady," returned the negro, with a smile.

"Well, that's neither here nor there. We want to go to bed. Help me across the aisle into that empty place which the disagreeable looking man has left, to go to the smoking compartment. Fix the upper berth for me, and take care you don't smash my things."

Joseph looked his surprise, but began to do as requested, without delay. Edith, also, lent a hand to piloting madam toward the opposite seat, then watched with amazement the bestowal of their mutual parcels into spaces incredibly small.

"Oh! they understand their business. One of the few classes of servants who do. They wouldn't, either, if they weren't compelled. They would lose their situations if they were incompetent. I hate incompetence almost as much as I do lying. Yet the world's as full of one as the other. There. That'll do. Now, Edith, I'll get ready first. After I've climbed up, then

you get to bed, too, as soon as you can. You mustn't disturb me after I've retired."

"I'll try not, of course. But, dear madam, why don't you take the lower berth and let me get up there? I'm young and don't mind. It does not seem right that I should have the most comfortable place."

"Lots of things don't seem right. One more or less doesn't matter. Help me off with my cloak and bonnet. I always wear a loose-gown in traveling so as to save bother. After I've got settled put them over my feet. And, Abigail, don't you snore. I couldn't stand snoring."

"I'll try not," again agreed Edith; ignoring the new name which had been thrust upon her.

The girl played lady's maid for a brief time, then the madam cried:

"Now, porter! Oh! porter!"

"Yes, lady," returned the porter from a distance down the car.

"Fetch me the steps. I'm ready."

"All right, lady. Here you are."

Divested of her outer wraps Madam Eastman moved with surprising ease, and presently had

her foot upon the lower step of the short ladder brought for her benefit.

“Seems sort of shaky. Think it will bear my weight, eh, man?”

“Bear a ton, lady.”

“Quit that continual ‘ladying’ and lend a hand.”

“All right, la—up you goes, la——”

And down she came ! with a suddenness and a crash that made Edith catch her breath in alarm, and turned even Joseph’s sable countenance a lighter shade.

The canvas strap which held the back and front of the slender steps together had parted and Madam Eastman had tumbled in an ignominious heap upon the sleeper’s floor.

CHAPTER VII

THE MIKADO IN A HANDBAG

THERE was instant commotion in the crowded sleeper. Women rushed forward proffering aid and expressing sympathy, while the unfortunate porter came in for a liberal share of blame and abuse.

“Didn’t know it was so nearly worn out? Well, you should have known it.”

“Any limbs broken? Wonderful escape. Truly wonderful, considering her age and infirmity.”

Now the little madam was prone to bewailing her own physical ailments and to advertising her own years, but it was quite another matter when somebody else did this service for her. It made her indignant; so that now, as soon as she had recovered from the shock of her fall, she got upon her feet with surprising agility and confronted her fellow-passengers with flashing eyes.

“Oh! I’m no imbecile! I don’t go about the world breaking my bones for anybody’s benefit. But you all saw it, didn’t you? You’d be willing to testify to the carelessness of the porter and the death-traps set by the railway company for unfortunate people who are forced to use their line. Eh? You all saw it, I say, didn’t you?”

Most of them had seen it; yet there were few, indeed, who would care to be mixed up in any “case” against a formidable corporation. To bear witness meant delay, inconvenience and great unpleasantness. With one accord they began to slink away to their own places, and the excited sufferer of the accident was left alone, save for Edith.

Then, when she had paused for breath and to scan contemptuously the retreating occupants of the various sections, there advanced from the stateroom a dignified gentleman, who addressed her by name and with great respect.

“Why, Madam Eastman! we meet under unfortunate circumstances, but I am glad to say I may be of some use to you. My stateroom is at your service and that of your companion.”

“General Sweet! I am delighted, I’m sure;

but your stateroom? Indeed, no. I couldn't think of depriving you of that comfortable place. Though I warn you I did try, before we left town, to secure it for myself and was no end indignant that I failed. Of course, had I known it was you I was seeking to discommodate, I should not have done so ;” and in spite of the narrow space allowed for it, as well as her previous lameness, the old lady swept the gentleman a courtesy which for deference and grace might well be imitated by a later generation.

General Sweet acknowledged this by a profound and equally effective obeisance. Then followed a few moments' further parley, ending, as both these old aristocrats knew was inevitable, in an exchange of quarters.

“But what is to become of me?” cried Edith, in consternation, as she saw the porter removing Madam Eastman's luggage to the distant stateroom.

“My dear! Where I go you will go, as a matter of course,” returned the lady, still maintaining that air of the grand dame which she had assumed upon the chance meeting with one of her own social plane, but which she had not

cared to "wear out" in the intercourse with strangers, presumably "commonplace."

"It certainly is an ill wind that blows nobody good," remarked Madam Eastman, as they settled themselves in the luxury of a sleeping apartment quite to themselves. "And what a lucky tumble that was! Right off a top shelf under a skylight into that wide, springy couch! Congratulate yourself, my dear, that your cousin and my silly companion did not come. I foresee that we shall have a lovely time together, and you will have the opportunity of making the acquaintance of one of the noblest men and finest gentlemen in the world. He and I were young together in Philadelphia. He is a director of this road and we will receive every attention while we are traveling upon it."

"But, are you sure you did not hurt yourself? Can't I do something for you? and is it really right for me to be here and him out there?"

"One thing we did not do in my young days was to belabor our elders with questions. We accepted the good that came to us and were thankful. Do you suppose, for even the twentieth part of a second, that a gentleman—a

gentleman, my dear,—could be at all comfortable in here after such an accident as happened out there to an old friend? No, indeed. A gentleman would find this delightful spring mattress a veritable bed of thorns. Now go to sleep, after you've said your prayers and don't forget to give thanks for all your mercies, nor to mention a lonely old woman along with the rest of your friends."

The contradictory phases of Madam Eastman's manner constantly startled the inexperienced New Englander. Yet there was no doubting the sincerity of the stranger in all she said and did; and as she lay back at last, upon her pillow and relaxed something of the tension she had put upon herself, she looked so very frail and pallid that Edith yielded to impulse and bending over her, said:

"If you don't mind, I would like to kiss you good night."

"Kiss—me? Kiss me! Why, child alive, I can't remember when anybody has done that. Not since I was a widow, I think, and that's many more years than you're old. Why? I wonder!"

"I hardly know. Maybe because we are both

so far from home and everything belonging to us."

"You may be, dear heart, but I am not. I have homes by the score, yet not one a home to me now. I am a wandering spirit. But I should like it very much. I should like the feel of young lips on my old cheek once more."

So the kiss was given and accepted; and, under far more auspicious conditions than had seemed possible from its beginning, the oddly assorted pair bade each other good night and went to sleep.

They woke to the sunshine of a perfect day and its effect was excellent upon the spirits of both. In the novelty of her surroundings Edith forgot her homesickness, and the possession of the luxurious stateroom that she had coveted put Madam Eastman in what she called "fine fettle." But the girl observed with regret that she was the only young person in the car; all other occupants of it being middle-aged or very old. All, too, she came later to find out, were going to the "Slope" in pursuit of health and to avoid the rigors of an Eastern winter.

"Well, you may be thankful that you are

the only one, my dear. If there were another girl on board she would doubtless be disagreeable. Half-grown maidens mostly are. You'll be greatly petted and—abused."

"Abused, Madam Eastman? why? how?"

"Why? Because it's so much easier to use other people's legs than one's own; as, for instance, I now bid you: 'Hand me that soft shawl out of the upper berth;' when I neither need the shawl nor am unable to serve myself. You'll be at everybody's beck and call, all the way over. Let me see. Ah, yes! The same old crowd. Wearing different shapes and clothing, but in reality the very identical set that I've traveled with a score of times. Hear me prophesy;" concluded the eccentric old lady, rising to stand and peer between the curtains of her doorway down the long sleeper and at its various tenants.

From this vantage point she coolly scrutinized her fellow-passengers, using her lorgnette so effectively that she soon catalogued the whole company. After which she returned to her cushions by the window and reported her observations:—

"Just as I told you. There's the fussy old

woman in Number Nine, who will lose things, from her specs to her arctics, which the ridiculous creature has brought along for use in a railway car! She'll call upon you to 'seek them' every station she gets out at, and she'll get out at every one between here and Los Angeles. She'll do it for the air and to stretch her stiff joints."

"That should rest her some, shouldn't it?" laughed Edith.

"Yes. It will her—but not you. She'll demand your assistance with neatness and despatch. She'll not get it though, for I now pre-demand it for myself. Then there's the half-blind old gentleman who will ask you to pick out the stock news and read to him from every newspaper he can lay his hands upon, and that'll be about fifty in all. He will buy them everywhere en route. There is the dear old couple in Number Thirteen, just outside our door, who are going to 'Riverside' to spend a winter eating oranges off their son's ranch. They are as excited and ignorant as the babes in the woods. She's a W. C. T. U. woman and has a bottle of grape juice in her basket. I saw it. She is tempting her old husband to taste

it, this minute. In the far-away section at the other end is an Englishwoman. I've seen her before, in proper person. She is a globe-trotter, same as myself. I met her last on an Indian desert—East Indian—where we were each trying to get up courage for a camel-back ride. I've ridden everything that travels on four legs and is big enough to hold me, but a camel beats the lot. For all wobbley, sea-sickish motions the humpback has the choicest assortment. When he begins to unfold himself and straighten up—My! how that woman screamed. She'll recognize me, presently, and then, my child, just keep your ears open and listen. She always carries a little bottle of patent medicine. After we've reached the warmer latitudes and all begun to feel a little peculiar in our heads and stomachs, she'll come along and offer the sweet old lady a dose of it. The poor innocent will be so pleased at the thoughtful attention and drink it. The Englishwoman will think that is fine and enjoy the episode—if I don't interfere. Hmm! What are you opening your eyes so wide for?"

"It sounds like a story book. It doesn't seem real that you, who are sitting just beside

me, can have seen so much and know so many people. Aunt Comfort——”

“Very likely I should make her stare, too ; but I think she would not object to anything I may do or say to you. I’ll keep her in mind, child, and some day I hope I’ll make her acquaintance.”

At this Edith’s eyes expressed still greater wonder. She had been accustomed to hearing people as old as Madam discuss no future except such as pertained to death and eternity ; yet here was this Madam Eastman discoursing as hopefully as if her eighty years lay before and not behind her.

Again the shrewd interpreter of others’ thoughts read those of the girl before her and commented upon them.

“Isn’t it better so, my dear ? Do you think that the real things—the life eternal and the beatitude of that existence—are less vital to me because I act out my nature and get the most fun from this earthly life that I can ? Not a bit. Keep young, child ; always keep young. That helps one’s self and one’s neighbors, also. Then, too, I have been greatly blessed by having the wherewithal to travel and learn some-

thing about this earth of ours. By the way, lassie, this overland trip will educate you more than two years or more of your best high-schooling. It's history, geography, and human nature all in one. I'll furnish considerable of the latter, you're thinking. So I will. Ah! 'by the pricking of my thumbs' here is my English-woman!"

Another peculiarity of Madam Eastman's was the rapidity of her speech; which though clearly enunciated compelled the person addressed to pay strictest attention. But she ceased as suddenly as if the speaker's own teeth had bitten her words off short, and Edith turned about to see the approaching lady. She came swinging down the aisle, with the assured tread of one to whom swaying railway carriages were habitual abodes, glancing briefly but keenly to right and left and evidently forming swift judgments concerning her car mates. As Madam had surmised she had a predilection for extreme age, and she paused for an instant beside Number Thirteen to lay her hand lightly upon the old mother's shoulder and bid a cheery: "Good morning, dear! I hope you rested well, last night."

"Why, does she know her?" whispered Edith.

"Probably never met before, but she knows life; and that to go through the world shedding brightness, even if people haven't been 'introduced,' is a truer interpretation of it than to make one's self an oyster."

Madam's explanations were sometimes as puzzling to the village-bred girl as the points they were intended to explain; but she had no time for further inquiry. The vigorous figure, clothed in the black-and-white-check, tailor-made suit, which had doubtless been worn over several thousand miles of travel, yet still retained its freshness, by reason of its wearer's daintiness, came on for the few remaining steps, and met Madam Eastman in the stateroom doorway.

In breathless curiosity Edith watched this extraordinary meeting. But though the English-woman's eyebrows lifted slightly and her advance was suddenly checked, there was no further sign of surprise. She merely extended her strong hands and clasped the trembling ones of her old friend with the exclamation:

"Wasn't it absurd, how frightened I was! yet you rode like an old Arab! As composedly

as if you'd been marshaling caravans over the sands all down the ages. Well, I'm glad we've met; and whither now?"

"Las Vegas. To coddle my rheumatism. And yourself?"

"El Coronado, for a time. Am to meet a party who've come round the other way, from Japan, Alaska, 'Frisco, and down the coast by steamship. We were due to meet a week ago, but I was detained."

Although she asked no questions, the lady's eyes rested for a moment, and with marked admiration, upon Edith's fair and eager face; and inviting her old acquaintance into the state-room, Madam Eastman introduced the strangers as :—

"Lady Jane Grey—not the beheaded one, nor even a descendant—Miss Edith Hale. Lost my regular 'companion' at Chicago—by marriage. I found this lassie in my section, also waiting for an unknown escort who hasn't yet materialized. We joined partnership in the disputed section, then I fell off the steps and another friend gave us this room. Oh! some day I shall get wise enough to work my passage through the world very comfortably for myself,"

laughed the whimsical old body, fixing her keen gaze on the New Englander's face and hugely enjoying its varying expressions.

Then her own countenance lighted with fresh interest, and she exclaimed:—

“This wonderful crazy-quilt of life! I like this child well enough to wish her well, yet I must leave her at the Springs. I've been hoping something would happen to make me easy about her and it has: you've happened, Lady Jane. I wish you'd keep her in charge till she reaches her friends. They must be very near San Diego. By the way, Edith, what did you say was their name?”

“I don't remember that you asked, but the family name is Garcelon.”

Madam Eastman and Lady Jane exchanged astonished glances and the former exclaimed:

“Well! of all things! If I'd known that before I certainly shouldn't have selected you for a companion. My! what a little world it is!”

Edith had her own share of family pride and spirit; and though her mother's people were strangers to her she could not hear any reflection upon them without protest.

“I am sorry that our name offends you ; and if my presence here has ceased to be agreeable I will ask the conductor to find me some other place. He will be obliged to do it, I should think.”

“Hoity, toity, child ! Never get angry over trifles. That will shorten your life. I repeat that I surely would not have chosen a descendant of an enemy for my stateroom mate, but having done so I am delighted to find one of the race can be so charming. By the way, Lady Jane, I’ve a mind to alter my plans and go right through with you. The rheumatism can wait.”

She did not add, nor did Edith dream, that this sudden decision which appeared but another of her many vagaries was really a generous wish on her part to look after the girl who had so greatly won her fancy.

CHAPTER VIII

SANTA ROSA

“THERE is nobody here to meet you, so far as I can learn. Well, I should have been surprised if there had been ;” remarked Madam Eastman, as the trio of travelers stepped down from the “La Joya” upon the station platform at San Diego, into the full glory of a sunshiny day.

Edith’s railway experiences had taught her many things, among these the uncertainty of anybody keeping an appointment. She knew that her grandfather had written her unknown relatives on what date and by what train to expect their visitor, and that in addition to the letter he meant to go to the expense of a telegram, so that she might not have the disappointment which now confronted her—of landing in a strange place unwelcomed.

The girl’s heart sank, for a moment ; but she had never forgotten nor quite forgiven her com-

panions' unfavorable reception of the Garcelon name and she rallied her courage on its behalf.

"I suppose there has been some misunderstanding; but that it will be easy for me to get a carriage to take me there."

The old lady did not immediately reply. She was busy greeting some acquaintances who had come to the station to meet the "overland," and from their manner toward her, Edith judged her to be a most welcome arrival. Even the hack drivers from the various hotels seemed familiar with her and raised their hats hopefully, anticipating her patronage. The girl noticed, also, that the old aristocrat treated these humbler folk with a simple friendliness which easily explained their evident liking for her.

Lady Jane held out her hand:—

"Well, madam, I'll say good-by and be off across the ferry. I'm impatient now to meet my people. Odd, isn't it? how much longer the last few minutes of waiting seem than all that has gone before. Don't forget your promise to come over and dine with us to-night, and give my love to any old friends you may meet at the Florence. Good-by, Miss Edith. I wish

you everything delightful, and trust we may see each other again, soon. Good-by."

As the stage for El Coronado rolled away, the long, dusty train also pulled out from the station, bound for its one last stopping place, a few miles further south. To Edith, standing alone and forlorn, in a glare of sunlight which dazzled her, it seemed like the departure of a faithful friend. The little stateroom of the "La Joya" had become a sort of home to her, and a sickening desolate feeling stole over her, seeming to stiffen her throat and turn her giddy.

"Three thousand miles from home and not a soul I know!"

For kind as Madam Eastman had been their association was ended. The old lady's belongings were being stowed away in a carriage and she was, presently, helped after it by a solicitous attendant. Then the door was shut with a bang and the driver sprang to his place.

"Oh! I didn't think she would do that! She has been good to me but I have been good to her, too, or tried to be. I've rubbed her aching joints till she fell asleep, and combed her hair, buttoned her boots, read to her till my throat ached, and she doesn't even say good-by!"

Did she not?

The restless horses were faced about and brought to a sudden stand-still close to the end of the platform where the New Englander stood, now almost the last person left of the throng which had crowded the spot but a few moments before. Then madam leaned forward and beckoned through the window.

Edith approached, with a swift rebound of feeling.

"Thought I'd deserted you, didn't you? I supposed you would. But I haven't. I'm going to my hotel, and you are to wait here, in the room yonder, till this carriage comes back. It wouldn't be worth while to take all your luggage up the hill and down again, since your route lies southwest, any way. I'll send a woman back to go out with you to your people. It's a long drive, fifteen miles or more, and you mustn't take it alone. After she's placed you with your relatives she'll come back. Then I shall have done all for you that I can."

"Oh! madam! how kind you are to me! But—please wait just a moment. How much——"

She spoke to the empty air. Already the

hack was bowling upward toward the hotel on the bluff and the question of whether she had money sufficient left in her purse to pay for so long a drive could not be answered.

“Well, it can’t be helped. I couldn’t go to a hotel, because I’ve heard madam and Lady Gray talk, and the prices they spoke of paying would be out of the question for me. I’d have to camp somewhere out-of-door, I’m afraid. Seventy dollars a week for a room overlooking the ocean appeared to Lady Jane to be quite moderate. Imagine Aunty Comfort’s horror at such waste. However, it won’t do for me to think of home or I shall break down.”

Yet she came very near doing so when Madam Eastman’s cab returned quite empty; and the tales of wild life on the “Slope” such as Eli had surreptitiously purchased and read to her, years before, came into mind. For the driver promptly informed her that:—

“The old lady couldn’t get the housekeeper, or nobody else, to-day. There’s a big reception or sunthin’ or other going on and everybody was needed to help. You’re to go along with me and needn’t be afraid to trust me. I know the road well. Druv over it hundreds of times.

The Garcelon ranch is about the last sample of what used to be round these diggin's and towerists mostly go out to stare at it. I'm an old forty-niner, I am. Been in Californy ever since. When I crossed the plains I 'spected to make my pile and go back with a band of music and colors flying. Pshaw! Here's where I landed—a livery hack-driver in the jumping off-city of the Union. That's life; that is."

Readjusting his horses' harnesses for their long task he asked:—

"This your truck? The whole of it? Well, climb in. A thirty-mile drive 'twixt now and sundown is a steepish piece of work even for my team, and there ain't none to beat it round here. My name is Eleazer Mason. I hail from New Hampshire, town of Canaan, on the old Connecticut."

"New Hampshire? Why, so do I!"

The honest, sunbrowned face of the pioneer brightened instantly and he extended his hand in what he called a "regular Masonic grip"; explaining:—

"Always save that kind for our own folks. Livin' so far from home makes the little old state 'pear as if it all belonged to me, with all

its natives. My ! but it's a small world, when all's told !”

“That's just what madam said, and she's been a great traveler, I guess.”

“There you are ! That settles it. All New Hampshire ‘guesses’ at its facts. Fixed comfortable ? Giddap, there, boys ! G’long ! My stars, if this don’t do me good ! What town you from ?”

“Sissmissit.”

“Hey ? Not Sissmissit on the Merrimac ? Nigh Concord ?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“You don’t say ! Know any Johnsons there ?”

“Several families. Two Johnsons, Eli and Maria, live with my grandfather, the minister.”

“Shake ! Shake ! Eli Johnson’s my maternal cousin twice removed !”

“Your cousin ! How wonderful and strange !”

“Nothing on earth so pesky strange as the truth. Story-novels can’t hold a candle to fact. Me and Eli was raised together. He was a cantankerous little shaver. What sort of man has he made ?”

“Well ?—” laughed Edith.

“Hmm! Exactly. Same old sixpence. And Maria?”

It was good to talk and good to hear. In a very short time these two estrays from New England had learned all the facts of each other's history and it was noticeable that Mr. Mason's expression grew serious as Edith explained that:—

“I don't know just what I am to do here. Whether I shall go to school, still, or not. The letter of instructions that my father left merely stated that I should be trained New England way until I was sixteen and then be sent to my grandmother Garcelon for her to do with me as she desires. When I become eighteen—that's of age, isn't it?—I am to have the little money my parents left and may do just what I wish with it. They hoped by giving me this two-sided sort of raising, I might develop a 'noble, well-rounded character, free from prejudices and bigotry.'”

“Hmm. Your father wasn't so foolish as he seemed. Beg pardon, that's my rough way. What I mean is that he knew, pesky well, if you spent all your first years in Yankeedom you could no more help learning to be capable

and honest and correct in every way than you could help breathing. The first part of a youngster's life is what tells. Well, I'm interested to watch the outcome. And—if you ain't going to meet a difference, my name ain't Eleazer Mason !”

Edith's heart sank. From Madam Eastman and Lady Jane, and now again from this person who, also, seemed to know her mother's family, she had received a pitying sympathy, as if her prospects were dark indeed. But an indignant protest rose to her lips :—

“ Well, though I don't yet know them, I have faith to believe that any family into which my father married must be quite all right. Do you know if it is a large one ? ”

Mr. Mason suppressed a whistle. It amazed him to find her so ignorant of those among whom she was to live, yet it was not for him to further add to her uneasiness.

“ There's a goodish lot of youngsters around, but who and which they are I don't know. As for family being good—that's just the trouble. They're all so pesky proud of their old Castilian strain that our latter-day folks aren't hardly fit to touch. But—you belong amongst 'em.

You're of their own blue-bloodedness, and I guess it will be all right. If it isn't, if ever while you're in Southern Californy, or anywhere else, for that matter, you need a friend, just remember that Eleazer Mason, of Canaan, New Hampshire, will serve one of his own folks, with his bottom dollar and his last strength."

"Thank you. You are very, very kind. Still, I hope that I may never need apply for your assistance, though I shall be delighted to have you for a friend."

The words were so earnestly spoken and the girl's face was so sincerely grateful that the Forty-niner was moved to add:

"Pshaw! You'll get along. I can see. You've the Yankee faculty and that's really another sense. Now look sharp, right over yonder. There she lies. Santy Rosy rancho—or what's left of it."

Edith's gaze followed the pointing whip. Crowning the mesa before them lay a long range of low white buildings, standing out square and bare against the sky line and the brown level that stretched unbroken on every side. Save that in the distant background there rose two sharp mountain peaks; and that

in the very heart of the clustered buildings there showed a few tree-tops.

“Why, how sort of set apart it looks! I saw other adobe buildings, as we came along, but nothing to compare with those. It’s like a little village, isn’t it?”

“It’s pretty big even yet; and time was that Santy Rosy was famous all up and down the coast.”

Then they began to climb the steep road to the bluff above and even Eleazer’s tongue became silent, for it took all his skill to pilot his team through and over the rain-washed, ill-kept wagon track. When they had covered the ascent he drove in a semicircle to the rear of the buildings and stopped before a wide opening in a gray-green hedge, so curious in appearance that the New Englander exclaimed in surprise:

“What can it be! I never saw anything like that!”

“Guess you didn’t. Prickly pear fence. About six to ten foot thick, and a hundred years old if it’s a day. Look’s if ’twould keep the Indians out, don’t it? That was what it was planted for, I ’low.”



A STIR OF LIFE AMONG THE BRANCHES

Beyond the forbidding hedge lay a court or garden of such surpassing loveliness that Edith could only gaze in silent admiration.

"Kind of a oasis in the desert of Sahary, ain't it?" demanded Eleazer, watching the girl's face. "That beats Sissmissit, don't it? At this time o' year, anyhow."

"Oh! the roses, the roses! If grandfather could see them!"

Roses, indeed. By the hundreds of thousands, clustering on the mighty vines that had outlived several generations; roses of every hue known to the race and of odors so pungent that they reached far beyond the gateless entrance of the old rancho. When the roses had somewhat ceased to dazzle, Edith discovered other astonishing things. Heliotropes, such as in Aunt Comfort's northern garden had required most fostering treatment, here ran riot with a world of bloom and fragrance; while great banks of calla lilies held up their ivory chalices, full to the brim with beauty and sweetness.

Presently, among the crowding branches there was a stir of human life, for the arrival of the surrey had aroused the inmates of the house; and with shouts of delight a bevy of children

swarmed out of the garden and settled themselves upon any available part of the vehicle that would sustain their weight. They did this without any regard to Mr. Mason or his companion, and simply to satisfy their own thirst for novelty.

A pair of lads forced themselves upon the seat where Edith still remained, and began a vigorous jumping up and down in the fancy that they were riding. Another lad, much taller and who in staid Sissmissit would have been ashamed of such childishness, leaped to a place beside Eleazer and, seizing the reins from that worthy's hands, excitedly waved them to make the horses prance. This the well-trained team refused to do, and Edith forgot to be afraid in watching the disappearance overhead of a fourth pair of small brown legs.

The assault of the carriage roof was the signal for a fresh raid from the garden and a fifth urchin was already shinning up the slender support of the canopy when the proprietor interfered. Smiling good-naturedly, he grasped an ankle firmly and jerked its owner to a seat upon his knee.

"No, you don't. Not up there. You're

used to takin' advantage of me but there's limits. There's limits, young man. One of 'em is to your neglecting your manners. Turn yourself around, instanter, and bid your cousin how-de-do."

For the first time the children began to treat Mr. Mason and Edith as if they were more alive than the carriage, and the little fellow on the hackman's lap shyly brought a pair of beautiful dark eyes to bear upon the stranger girl. His own face was bewitching in its rich beauty and she exclaimed, eagerly :

"Oh, you darling ! Are you my cousin, truly ?"

He did not reply, but her question had brought a half-dozen other faces to peer into her own, with curious and not unfriendly intentness. Suddenly she smiled, and the responsive smiles broke down the last vestige of uncertainty.

With a bound as light and easy as their own movements she was upon the ground among them, catching up the youngest in her arms and kissing its pretty face again and again. Something warm stirred within her lonely heart and banished homesickness. She had never

seen anything so lovely as this crowd of young folks, who no longer seemed strangers but of close akin. The scantiness and brevity of their attire scandalized her and their want of breeding instantly suggested the stern decorum of Miss Comfort. Nevertheless, she loved them, at once, without reservation; and old Eleazer on his driver's seat remarked to himself:

“Pshaw! If that don't beat all! Say what you will, blood is thicker'n water, an' she's clear forgot me a'ready or that I hail from Canaan an' know Eli.”

Meanwhile, Edith was swiftly moving down the weed-entangled path toward the broad porch of the old adobe mansion and the stately figure which stood in its doorway.

“Well, I declare! that's the old Seenory herself with all her war paint on! How'll them two tackle each other, I wonder!” quoth Eleazer, leaning forward to watch the meeting.

CHAPTER IX

A MOONLIGHT VISITOR

EAGER and yet afraid, Edith paused before the broken step leading to the porch.

The figure in the doorway was a revelation to her. She had never dreamed that age could wear this guise or be so beautiful, even beyond the loveliness of the garden children.

With shoulders unbowed as a girl's and a waist as slender, clothed, too, in girlish white that was matched by her wonderful piled-up hair, the Señora Dona Rosa Garcelon might well have astonished one of even wider experience than the simply-reared Edith, whose elderly acquaintances were always garbed in somber colors and carried themselves feebly. But she was not left to speculate for long upon anything. A pair of fair white hands were extended toward her and a voice of exceeding sweetness exclaimed;

“It is the daughter of my daughter! They

are Jesuita's eyes that gaze upon me—her very own. My dove, my little one ! ”

Again that curious feeling of kinship, so strong that it instantly banished strangeness, thrilled the New Englander's heart, as she felt herself enfolded by the Señora's arms and her travel-soiled head pressed close to her grandmother's breast. Then she was held off again, that the lady's eyes might search afresh for family resemblance ; and again was clasped close and long.

“ But why did not Alarico fetch you, my darling ? He went with the cart at daybreak to meet you. He surely must have been in time.”

“ Did you send for me then ? I am so glad. They said——”

“ Eh ? What ? Who said, heart's dearest ? ”

Edith blushed and stammered ; then answered truthfully :

“ Some people who were very kind to me on the way. Who seemed to know you and—and—I fancy did not like you.”

“ Ah, indeed ! That matters not. A person who has no enemies is a person of small account. But the man yonder. The carriage driver, the insolent. He comes often to stare

at us in our poverty as he would not have dared to do in the days that are gone. Not even when David, your father, dwelt with us. You are like him too, precious. Come in, come in. Ysidra, O Ysidra !”

Sweetly modulated as was the Señora's voice it still had a penetrating clearness that carried far ; and in prompt response to the summons there appeared a woman as strongly in contrast to the elder lady as possible. She was swarthy and rotund and her features so ill-matched that each might have been selected from some different face. Her own voice, also, in answering, was harsh and her manner brusque to coarseness.

Yet she seemed a person of importance, for the Dona Rosa now addressed her almost appealingly :

“It is the niece of your husband, Ysidra mia. She will need refreshment after her long journey and water heated for her bath. Is it that she may be attended, my daughter ?”

“What must be, will be,” replied Ysidra, sententiously ; and vouchsafed no further notice to the newcomer. Then steps were heard upon the porch and glancing back Edith saw Eleazer

bringing in her trunk and watching her curiously from beneath his shaggy brows.

"Oh! Mr. Mason, isn't that too heavy for you to carry alone?"

"Pshaw! that ain't nothin'. Good day, Señory. I hope you find yourself well."

There was a brief hesitation on the lady's part before she returned the salutation with great suavity. Eleazer was a man whom, without knowing, she detested, but he had come beneath her roof and was entitled to an almost exaggerated courtesy, in accordance with the code in which she had been trained.

But there was no hesitation on the part of his recent passenger as she flew to his side and exclaimed:

"You see it is all right, Mr. Mason! Those people who were afraid for me did not understand. Isn't she beautiful—beautiful? Does it seem possible she can be old enough to be my grandmother?" asking the last under her breath that the Señora might not hear.

"No. It don't. Grandmas out Canaan way gen'ally wore caps and shoulder shawls. But—well, never mind. I must step out and look to my horses, and as soon as they've rested a

bit start back to town. I'll fetch in the rest of your traps now."

He rose clumsily from the low, rather dilapidated chair which he had occupied, evidently thankful that it had not collapsed beneath him. Then he brought in the remainder of Edith's belongings and directed by the Señora carried them down the long suite of rooms to one at the eastern end, which had a door opening upon the porch as well as several small windows facing upon that and the mesa surrounding the mansion. For, despite the air of decay everywhere visible, a mansion it still remained, and, as Eleazer expressed it, seemed big enough to shelter a regiment.

"Oh ! how pretty ! Dear grandmother, how good of you !"

Indeed, at first sight, the square, whitewashed apartment appeared a bower of beauty. The riotous rose-vines had circled a corner of the old adobe, as if seeking to hide from the room's inmates the bare outlook of brown and sandy mesa, while through the open door the most brilliant portion of the wonderful garden displayed itself. Over the low, tiled mantel were heaped branches of crimson roses, while other

roses, white and yellow, were tossed upon the table and even the bed with a lavish profusion that enchanted the New Englander.

“Oh! if Aunty Comfort could but see this!”

“Eh? what? Is it she who is the hard sister of my David son-in-law?”

“Yes, grandmother;” and upon that subject Edith felt that there was nothing more to say.

Just then both Eleazer and Ysidra came along the porch and appeared in the doorway. The latter deposited upon the earthen floor of the bedroom a great circular basket and emptied into it a bucket of water that she had borne upon her head.

“Oh! take care!” exclaimed Edith, catching even her own rather short skirts out of the way of an anticipated deluge.

But the others merely looked at her, as much surprised by her outcry as she was by Ysidra’s action.

Eleazer took upon himself to explain:

“That’s all right, girlie. That’s one o’ them Indian baskets made a purpose. Likely it’s been in the family a hundred years or more and will hold water tighter ’n any wooden

wash-tub ever turned out of Yankee land. I guess you couldn't buy one of them things for any price, 'cause some of the folks I've druv have tried it off the Indians themselves." Then as he saw the Señora regarding him with some curiosity he added: "Guess you haven't got none o' them old bath baskets for sale, have you?"

"The sale of anything—that is not our habit," replied the lady, proudly. "But, Ysidra, is the man's luncheon ready?"

"Oh! I ain't hungry. Not a mite. Besides, if I be, I have a snack of bread and cheese under the wagon seat," was Eleazer's rather mixed disclaimer of her proffered hospitality.

"There is a table in the court," said Ysidra, shortly, and casting one further searching glance upon Edith's interested face, stalked back whence she came.

Eleazer felt himself dismissed and held his hand toward the girl in farewell. She grasped it cordially, ignoring a protesting expression upon her grandmother's countenance; then suddenly remembered that she had not paid him for his services.

"How much do I owe you, Mr. Mason?" she

asked, opening her pocket-book which now held an extremely small sum.

“Not a ‘Continental’!”

“Why, but I must! All that long way—just take what I have, please, and if it isn’t enough——”

Eleazer waved her hand aside indignantly.

“Now, look a-here! Madam Eastman paid me once—though I’ll hand it back, soon’s I see her. But, child alive, do you s’pose I’d take money for hauling a friend anywhere? Ain’t you Eli’s folks? Ain’t Eli mine? Ain’t you from New Hampshire, any way? Why, it’s been a favor to fetch you, an’ all the obligation is on my side. More’n that, if ever you need—but I’ve said it once. Though a good story’ll bear repeating. Don’t forget it, that’s all. I ’low the Madam will be mighty pleased to hear you’ve found things so nice; and, likely, you’ll see me again ’fore long. Durin’ towerist-time I gen’ally get a job this way pretty often.”

The Señora had remained quietly listening; now she spoke again to the liveryman and with a much more respectful accent.

“You mean, my good man, that you have rendered the little Señorita, the daughter of

my daughter, this service out of the regard, only?

“Exactly, ma’am. I mean, Seeñory. She’ll tell you all about it. Some of my folks are her folks, too, and it’s all right. I wish you well, ma’am. I wish you both well, and good-by.”

“But your supper, Mr. Mason! Don’t go without your supper!” called Edith, earnestly. “And I haven’t really thanked you at all!”

“Is it so, Señor—ah—Mason. For one to visit in kindness at Santa Rosa, yet go away unfed, that is impossible. It is this way we pass, if you please, Señor.”

Her pride had now been banished by her hospitality, and though she still felt herself immeasurably superior to the hackman, none of this feeling was manifested in her manner.

Further resistance would be rudeness, and Eleazer was no more capable of that than the lady of the mansion herself. Making his most polite and, therefore, his stiffest bow, he permitted Edith to take his hand again and lead him after the Señora to the table under the palm tree.

Here were chairs in waiting that looked as if

they might themselves be outgrowths of the garden, so weather-worn were they and—alas! so rickety! The first one Eleazer essaying just quietly giving way beneath him, as if with the same noiseless courtesy that marked the mistress' own manner.

She was not disturbed by the accident and gracefully nodded toward another, which Mr. Mason wisely tested before using. Edith was made to sit beside her grandmother and could not keep from her own honest eyes her astonishment at the food placed before them; and her thoughts flew back to Maria's bountiful larder and a picture of Eli's face had he been requested to satisfy his hunger here.

A fine, but well-darned napkin covered the center of the warped table, and upon this were placed a few dishes of rare china, with a silver goblet and pitcher. The silver was dingy and the water had lost its sparkle, while the only eatables in sight were some pieces of hard dried meat with a small, equally uninviting, pile of biscuits.

Edith glanced in dismay at Eleazer and saw his eyes twinkling, nor did it tend to her composure that he suddenly gave her a start-

ling wink and ejaculated, under his breath:
“Eli!”

However, the Señora found nothing wanting or out of common; and while her guests tried their utmost to do justice to her hospitality—and nearly choked themselves in the attempt—she entertained them with discourse about her garden. This, evidently, was the great delight of her life, and every plant in it appeared to have its own history.

“That date palm, shading the well-curb, was set there by, probably, the very first settler here. The Garcelons were almost the first good family to follow him and make a home. We still enjoy the fruits of his goodness. And the white rosebush, yon—see? The very first Rosa of San Rosa thrust down the cutting with her own white hand. That cactus—eh? What? So soon? Why not the night here, Señor Mason, since you have brought me the daughter of my daughter—almost another Jesuita! to cheer my old age? To all of the household it will great pleasure give,” she finished, as Eleazer’s rising terminated her floral descriptions.

“Thank you, ma’am—I mean, Señory. But I must be gettin’ along. I’m much obliged to

you for my supper and if I can do any arrant for you down to the city I hope you'll let me. I'd admire to serve you, if I can. As for you, Edith, just count me same's your own folks; and if you should be writing home to Siss-missit tell Eli I'm here and have grown up about as homebly as I 'spect he has! But I've got two rooms in my shanty and he's welcome to one of 'em if he'll come and take it."

"I'll tell him," laughed Edith.

Then her grandmother slipped an arm about her waist and answered Eleazer's offer:

"But there is an errand, yes. The lad, Alarico. It may be that he is known to the Señor Mason, for he is often in the city; or else he is posing here on the porch when the staring visitors drive up. He says he means not they shall be disappointed of their trouble," and she smiled indulgently. "Should you meet him along the way, ten thousand thanks, Señor Mason, to remind him that his unknown cousin has arrived. While his father sails the sea he is the representative of his house. I, the mother of his father, require his presence at San Rosa, yes."

Edith's eyes were upon the Señora's face.

Accustomed to the harsher speech of the north, the soft enunciation of the southerner was like music in her ears. Already she felt an almost adoring love for her beautiful grandmother and a firm belief that her character was equally flawless. She recalled Madam Eastman's tone of contempt with indignation and resolved to change that lady's opinion entirely.

In another moment Eleazer's surrey disappeared behind the house, on its way back to the city, and, with a little shiver, Señora Garcelon led the way indoors.

"Under the roof always after nightfall. In California it is not anything by a half. It is day or it is night. The one is for waking and enjoyment; the other for sleep. Marta! Attend your cousin, heart's dearest! See if she needs anything we can supply. Things are not as rich at Santa Rosa now, my child, as in the days when your mother wedded and left it. Even then they were far poorer than in the days before. But we are still the Gracelons. Remember that! Good night. Sleep well. A kiss, my dove, my little one!"

With an odd feeling that she had been dismissed like a naughty child, but too tired to

consider the matter further, Edith took Marta's rather soiled little hand and went down the long stretch of rooms to her own.

A frayed and coarse towel had been added to the preparations for the bath and a piece of soap such as Maria would have disdained for even laundry purposes; and though these were but trifles they were enough to make the girl realize that the new life upon which she had entered was to be indeed, entirely different from what she had known or anticipated. Her heart sank with a fresh access of homesickness, and rather hastily sending Marta away—the child had not uttered a word—she made her preparations and went to bed.

“Such a bed! It's like the soap and the towel!” she thought as she fell asleep.

A few hours later she woke suddenly, with the idea that somebody had called her. But there was absolute stillness all about her, and for a few moments she remained quiet, listening, and accustoming herself to the strangeness of the place. Through the uncurtained windows the moonlight flooded the apartment, making everything distinct almost as by daylight.

“How beautiful ! I never saw such moonlight !” she exclaimed, and raised herself upon her elbow to look out over the mesa.

Then a shadow seemed to pass between her and the radiance without, and turning back again for another nap, her glance fell on the now open doorway. There, motionless and silent, stood a blanket-wrapped figure, intently watchful ; and though the intruder’s face was hidden by the folds of the blanket that covered the head, Edith fancied she could see the gleaming of two piercing black eyes.

Surprise kept her, also, silent for a brief space of time ; and when she had rallied courage enough to speak, terror again prevented as the veiled visitor, with a curious hobbling gait, strode straight forward to the bed.

CHAPTER X

ALARICO ENTERTAINS

EDITH was too frightened for movement, yet amid all her fear there was an intense curiosity as to what would follow, and the outcry she would have uttered died upon her lips.

The figure paused beside the bed for a brief time, then a pair of thin hands were extended from the blanket and held above the girl's head while a cracked, unpleasant voice murmured some unintelligible sounds.

Evidently, no personal harm was intended her, so Edith plucked up courage to demand :

“Who are you, please? and what do you want?”

In very good English now, interspersed by a few Spanish phrases, the quavering voice replied :

“La Sabia, Susana, la Profetisa. What the Señorita will? I kiss your feet. I welcome you. I have waited long, is it not? But at the end I behold you. In your small hands lie the

fortunes of the Garcelons. Your slender fingertips have strength to remove the mountains and let loose the flood which shall overflow the mesa and the valley. You come to shed the light of prosperity upon the poverty-darkened rancho. In the name of your dead ancestors I make you welcome, light of my eyes, beloved of my last days. To rest. Sleep well. Adios !”

The long speech ended, the old woman—the Prophetess as she called herself—turned slowly about and vanished from the room. But the “good sleep” she had advised did not again come to the astonished stranger, who lay awake till morning, speculating about her queer visitor and finally deciding that she must be some crazy person. With amusement she reflected :

“How absurd to fancy that I—I—could repair the damaged fortunes of my family ! Well, her tone was kind and I’ll find out all about her as soon as I get up. My ! what a hard bed ! The mattress is no thicker than one of Maria’s comfortables, and such a funny bedstead. No springs or slats to hold the bedding up, nothing but some criss-crossed ropes. I wonder if my home folks are thinking of me as I of them. There, Edith Hale ! stop that ! here you are and

here you must do—whatever is to do. Grandfather bade me remember that there is a duty set for every hour of everybody's life, and that to perform it well is to be happy. Wise, precious old man! But 'duty' isn't half so nice a word as 'pleasure' though I do mean to make somebody glad because I'm here. Ah! it's growing light, all at once, just as the night came down. That's what my pretty grandmother said. I wonder if my mother looked like her. I wonder if she was as homesick for Santa Rosa as I am for Sissmissit. Pshaw! in another moment I'll be crying like a baby. I'll go look out at the mesa and the mountains."

It was, indeed, through a burst of very natural tears that the exile beheld her first California sunrise, but the outlook was so lovely that she speedily forgot everything else and stood gazing eastward till she heard the sound of childish voices in the garden without. Then she made haste to dress and set open all the windows and the door. The windows were small and opened sidewise upon rusty hinges, while the heavy door was so loose upon its supports that it scraped a little trench in the earthen floor as it was forced ajar.

"The house as well as the family fortunes need repairing!" laughed Edith, as she stepped out upon the porch and into the immediate center of all the children.

"Good morning, cousins! How many are you and who are you? which is which, I mean. Ah! Marta—I know you, and little Dolores, and——"

"Not Alarico, yes!" demanded a deeper voice, as from behind a clump of manzanite there appeared a tall youth, bearing a monstrous, bouquet of every sort of flower, it seemed, hastily bunched together without regard to form or color.

"Alarico? The 'head of the family,' as grandmother said. Are you he, indeed?"

The tall fellow bent low over the hand so frankly extended, but instead of shaking it, as the easterner expected, kissed it rapturously, exclaiming:

"Now, indeed, has the sun arisen! San Rosa glows with pride to be so favored. I kiss your feet. I serve you. I make myself your slave, I—Alarico Maria Constantino Garcelon. I bid you welcome, most beautiful of cousins."

The lad might have stepped out of some old ro-

mance, so stilted was his speech, so artificial his whole manner; and Edith, who loved simplicity above all things, could not repress her laughter.

“Shades of our mutual ancestors! Is that the way you talk down here?”

But the delight with which she clasped the huge nosegay in her arms forbade the high-flown youth to take offense, though he looked into her honest eyes with astonishment.

“The laughter of my cousin is as musical as the sound of her speech.” Here Alarico bowed profoundly. “Behold, is it not that we are as foreigners to one another? That eastern—northern—place where dwell the people of my uncle-in-law—it is not as Santa Rosa. That the fair Señorita will soon behold.”

“Oh, indeed! I see it already. But, let’s understand each other right away. Just talk plain English and say what we mean—no more. I’m ever so glad to know you all and I wish you’d tell me who is who. Marta, you little thoughtful, come kiss me! And that baby—I heard somebody call him Juan. I want to kiss him, too. He is the very sweetest thing I ever saw!”

“The sweetest? Then Edithe has not yet glanced into a mirror!”

Edith lifted the little one, whom Marta led toward her and handing her flowers to another small cousin, started down the porch, still carrying him. The child dropped his long lashes and his shyness seemed the finishing touch to his wonderful beauty. Yet he nestled his head lovingly under her chin and the girl felt that however ridiculous her eldest cousin might be the youngest was worth traveling far to see.

Marta timidly clasped her new cousin's skirt with one labor-stained hand and remarked, as if she were imparting some wonderfully important news:

“Our grandmother is waiting her own breakfast for you.”

“Indeed? How smart you are at Santa Rosa. Why, even at Sissmissit we are not so early, yet we are considered to be quite energetic. It must give you long, delightful days.”

“It is execrable, yes,” murmured Alarico, who followed the little procession, bearing the huge bouquet which he had again taken from a small sister. “Yet the Señora objects that a man shall enjoy himself! Bah!”

"A man? what man? I thought you were the head of the house, while Uncle Alarico is away."

Edith glanced mischievously into her tall cousin's face, and saw its rich color deepen. He was an exceedingly handsome youth, this bombastic Alarico, the second; with the great liquid dark eyes, the olive skin, dark waving hair, and flashing white teeth which seemed a common heritage of the Garcelon family. But over his comeliness hung a sentimental air, occasionally dashed by bravado, that was infinitely amusing to practical Edith.

"And am I not, why?"

"I don't know 'why,' exactly. You spoke of a 'man' and I guess you're not so much older than I am. I don't call myself a woman, yet."

The lad had no chance to reply for they had now reached the great room where the Señora awaited them, and Edith made haste to bid her good morning.

The old adobe mansion formed three sides of a square, surrounding the court or garden. The fourth side was completed by the pear-cactus hedge, and it was in the western wing that the great dining-room was situated. No sunlight

reached it till late in the day and as Edith entered it a real chill struck through her and she exclaimed, as soon as her salutation had been given :

“Do let me fetch you a shawl, grandmother ? In that thin dress and this air you will take cold.”

“Why no, heart’s dearest. I was never so foolish in my life. Take cold ? That is what the people of my son-in-law, David, were prone to do. Jesuita, poor dove——” She sighed profoundly, and regarded Edith with even keener scrutiny than on the night before. “You are like her. You are more like her than I thought, even. But there is a David in you, too ;” and again she sighed. This time with more annoyance than regret, Edith fancied, and with her natural abruptness, she asked :

“Didn’t you like my father, grandmother ?”

“Does one ‘like’ those who steal away their happiness ? Yet ask no questions, child, that will be difficult to answer. That life should be smooth, yes, one must avoid the unpleasant. The breakfast. Take the place beside me. Alarico !”

The youth came, bent low above the white

hand his grandmother held toward him and kissed it, humbly. Then he lifted himself and looked inquiringly into the Señora's eyes.

"The ne'er-do-well of all the Garcelons prostrates himself before her who ne'er-did-ill. Is there forgiveness for the fault, grandmother beautiful?"

Edith's own brown eyes were opened to their widest, and glancing toward her the Señora smiled and tapped the tall head of her grandson.

"The little lady of the north is amazed by your behavior, pride of my soul. It is not yet she understands us and our manner. Her own—she has much to learn, but first she must be happy. To be happy one must be comfortable. To be comfortable one must eat when food is ready, is it not? Your place, Alarico, beloved, and yours, Edith, heart's dearest."

There were two tables in that end of the room where the floor yet remained in fair repair; at the other and larger end the planks were broken and splintered, or in some spots quite wanting; so that one who would cross that space must step down upon the earth between the joists. One of the tables was large

and bare. It held a row of bowls and one big platter on which was a heap of something which resembled the hasty-pudding that made Maria's wash-day luncheon. There were no chairs about this table and a child promptly placed itself before each bowl, waiting with folded hands for the Señora's signal to begin.

At the smaller table spread with the same napkin which had done service at Eleazer's supper, was a pot of coffee, a pile of sweet cakes, and a dish of fresh figs. Edith's chair was placed beside her grandmother's, while that for Alarico stood opposite. When all was ready, the lady bowed her head reverently and repeated a brief grace, then leaned back in her chair and lifted her hand.

Instantly, Marta, who presided at the children's table, commenced to dish the pudding into the bowls and a deafening chatter of tongues began. The noise distracted Edith's own attention but seemed not at all to affect either of her immediate companions. She wondered why they were waiting, but this was evidently for Ysidra, who presently came in and stepping to her mother's chair poured the coffee and passed the cakes.

Edith looked up and greeted the silent woman with a bright: "Good morning!" which received no other recognition than a mumbled sort of grunt. Nor did either the Señora or her grandson vouchsafe Ysidra any greater attention than if she had been a hired servant. Although she was Alarico's mother and the daughter-in-law of Dona Rosa, her position in the household seemed a much lower one than Maria's at the parsonage.

It was all very puzzling and unsatisfactory to the newcomer; as unsatisfying, indeed, as the breakfast itself to her hearty appetite, accustomed to the abundance of a typical New England table. But she made what she could of the situation, resolving that should her hunger become too insistent she would seek her aunt Ysidra in her kitchen and demand at least a slice of bread and butter.

Breakfast over, the Señora rose and bidding Alarico:

"Make yourself the entertainer of your cousin Edith, beloved. It will be much that is new. At midday, bring her to me in the arbor of passion-flowers. It is there we will dine. Kiss me, Jesuita's daughter. And do

not feel, I entreat you, that you are less dear to me because for a little space I withdraw myself from the world. Those who are old must give the more time to their devotions. At midday, heart's dearest, we meet again."

Alarico rose, pushed aside his grandmother's chair and bowed his head respectfully while she glided from the room, with that peculiar noiseless movement which was so new to Edith's experience. Even the younger children became quiet as she left them and did not again resume their chatter till, having seen a door on the opposite side of the court close behind the Señora, the girl Marta waved her hand and shouted :

"To your play, little ones !"

They scattered like children let loose from school, with all the noise so many healthy youngsters were capable of making, but soon collected in a group without the porch, eying their new cousin with undisguised curiosity. If they were strange to her, she was equally so to them, and belonged, they judged, in the same class with the staring tourists who came so frequently to Santa Rosa. Tourists were beneath the notice of any Garcelon ; they had learned

that along with their first speech ; but, at the same time, tourists had often gifts of small coin or candy in their pockets and on that ground were not wholly despicable. Even Eleazer, who knew their habits, had brought a bag of sweets in his wagon yesterday. It might be that this odd girl, who wore a plain woolen gown and her hair in a braid, and was in all respects so different from themselves, yet was said to be of their own family—even she might have something delectable in that trunk of hers which had not yet been opened.

“If it will please my cousin, the broncho, Terror, will be honored by her visit. Shall we go to the stable, no?”

“A broncho ! Have you one ?”

Evidently this was of vital interest to Alarico. His manner became more natural—or like that to which Edith was accustomed in other boys—and he exclaimed :

“Have I not ! the very finest one in all the Californias !”

“It must be a splendid animal, then ? This is a land of good horses, is it not ?”

“In truth, yes. But my Terror—wait ! It is my happiness and his to serve. A drive

this fairest of mornings, eh? Will that please the little Señorita, my cousin of the north?"

Edith stopped on the path around the rear of the adobe that led to an outlying stable of the same material. The stable was in far worse condition than the main building of the rancho, but Alarico later assured her that it had once been full to overflowing with the purest thoroughbreds of the country.

"See here, boy. Don't speak so extravagantly. I'd like to be good friends, real jolly comrades. You look as if you had some fun in you but I can't talk on stilts any more than I can walk on them. I've said it before, but you seem to forget. Plain English, please, and I'm with you for every good time that's going."

The lad tossed back his head and laughed. He was inimitably graceful and Edith felt herself awkward enough in comparison; but she did not forget that she had come to Santa Rosa to live—not merely visit—and she longed to find something familiar. At present she seemed a stranger in a positively foreign land.

"The good time, is it? Come on! It shall be yours!"

He caught her hand with a joyous speed and

started at a run for a little paddock beyond the stable. Within the enclosure a diminutive horse was quietly grazing, but it pricked up its ears at Alarico's call, and after a moment's apparent scrutiny of the stranger, paced sedately toward the gate.

From his pocket the youth produced a lump of salt and, holding it to the broncho's lips, clutched the creature's mane with his free hand. By this time most of his brothers and sisters had also arrived, and with a masterful condescension he permitted, or ordered:

"The cart, Esteban! Step away, little Juan! Babies should be tied to their mother's apron strings. Haste, haste, Beatriz! The whip! The riata, my Carlos! It is for the daughter of the Señora who is dead that we make pleasure. Si?"

The helpers might readily have explained that even without the excuse of entertaining the new cousin the youth was quite accustomed to make pleasure for himself; and they served him as those who could readily anticipate his demands.

When all was ready Alarico caught the rope-patched reins in one hand and extended the

other to Edith, bowing profoundly as he did so. She touched the hand but lightly, however, and sprang easily to the seat upon the low wagon, a sort of compromise in form between a buckboard and a trotting gig. The seat was loose and would have thrown her to the ground had not she caught at the low dashboard and so saved herself; yet it balanced well enough when Alarico had taken his own place beside her, and with a low spoken: "Vamos!" urged the sedate-looking animal into a gentle trot.

"Oh! this is lovely! But—I have forgotten my hat! Though if it's only around this sort of meadow it doesn't matter much."

With an odd smile Alarico caught his own ragged sombrero from his head and deftly placed it upon his cousin's.

"It adds the one thing needed," he said gallantly, and bowed again.

"Alarico, you are the strangest boy I ever saw. Please save your poor neck any more trouble on my account. We'll consider the obeisances all made. And is this a broncho? Why, I thought they were fast! This fellow that you call a Terror would match old Derry

for slowness. And he seems too little to drag the wagon over this stubble, with we two in it."

"Ah! So? Your hand to your head, fair cousin, or your new headgear may take wings." Then he leaned forward and whispered a few Spanish phrases in the Terror's ears which immediately responded by a slight waving to and fro. It was the creature's manner of saying: "I understand!"

"Then—go! Go—like the bird you must beat."

CHAPTER XI

A DRIVE AND A WALK

TERROR went.

Edith remained in the wagon by holding fast to any part of it which presented; her clutch being loosened from time to time by its frightful bouncings. When she could catch her breath she gasped :

“Please, not so fast; I take it back! He isn’t slow—he’s—he’s horrible!”

“He’s fine!”

“Oh, yes! I admit! But—slower, please—please—I shall fall out!”

“You mustn’t! You’d be killed. My shoulder—I can stick—the dashboard—anything. No! don’t touch the reins! let the Señorita trust to me, and be patient. Yes. The road in a minute. We are coming to the road.”

They struck it presently, a level track across the mesa, soft and dusty, but far smoother than

the unbroken ground over which they had passed to reach it. Edith drew a long breath and relaxed her frantic hold of her cousin's firmly braced shoulder, but he felt the loosening of her fingers and ordered :

“ Don't ! Cling tight ! The cañon—the narrow trail ! He is—wild—to-day.”

Alarico's manner was now quite simple enough to satisfy even the New Englander, but one glance into his face showed her why this was so. He was frightened ! The stupid-looking broncho had developed a spirit of viciousness beyond anything even his master had hitherto seen, and was heading at reckless speed toward the point where the mesa ended abruptly above a deep and rocky cañon, along the side of which ran a narrow wheel track.

By this road, on many a previous day, the animal had been driven toward a ranch in the valley which was famous as an ostrich farm, as well as for the raising of fine horses. Upon a race-track there he had been practising for a race that was certainly unique ; for his two opponents in the case were a bicycler and an ostrich.

Thus far the huge bird had always been victor,

though the little Terror had been steadily gaining upon the distance between them, and of late had seemed to comprehend and take an almost human interest in what was required of him. Doubtless it was with some memory of former urgings that he now sped forward toward the valley-ranch and the familiar track. Not for him to care what befell those who rode behind him. His blood was up, the trail was sufficiently wide for his own passage, and if the wagon chanced to overturn, what was that to him?

The descent was steep and unbroken, though the road had been made to cut the cañon wall diagonally, with occasional wider spaces where meeting vehicles might pass. At each of these places Alarico attempted to check the broncho's speed, but his hands were powerless to do so, though they still clung firmly to the reins. His greatest dread was at the foot of the slope, where the road almost doubled upon itself, making a turn across the only passable point in the cañon bottom, and so onward into the valley beyond.

"Hold tight! For your life! Tight—tight!" whispered the lad, hoarsely, as they

reached this bottom of the slope and the turn of the road.

Edith's eyes were shut, for she could not bear to look upon what promised destruction; and they remained closed for some moments after the blow came. So long, indeed, that Alarico bent over her and earnestly implored her:

"Don't die, my cousin! Oh! my little cousin, wake up—wake up! The heart of our Grandmother will be broken! Ah! Ah! The pity, the pity!" was the startling fact to which she awoke.

"Why—what has happened?" she asked, looking around upon a mass of rock-pinks into which she had been thrown. "Oh! I see. He tipped us out. A Terror, indeed. Are you hurt? Am I, I wonder?"

There was no answer from this strange boy who was now upon his knees, half-crying, half-laughing, and murmuring devout thanksgivings in his soft, native tongue.

Surprised by his emotion but touched by the sight of his posture, Edith, also, gave thanks, though silently, in the depths of her heart and not with her lips. Then having finished his

devotions, Alarico sprang up and held his hands toward her.

“Let us see, light of our old adobe, how far you are safe. If no bones are broken, Car-amba!”

She laughed and rose, almost as lightly as himself, but for a moment afterward saw things about her somewhat confusedly. Then her head began to clear, and she gazed about with a glowing admiration.

“We have one thing to thank that horrid beast for—he threw us over in as lovely a spot as he could find. Oh! how beautiful it is!”

Before them stretched one of the most fertile and well-cultivated valleys of Southern California. On either side the arroyo, or river of sand, lay orange groves, varied by plantations of walnut, lemon, and olive. White houses and big barns dotted the landscape and these looked as if they might have been transplanted from New England itself, with their green blinds and white palings and general air of comfort. But there were no creeks or streams visible and so many windmills reared their slender shafts that Edith again exclaimed:

“It might be Holland—with a difference.

But that strip of sand, that you folks call a river, I should think would suck up all the moisture the windmills could produce. Is there ever water in it, really?"

"After the rains, you should see it! What are the bridges but bits of straw that are carried down like its own foam? But look yonder, if you will. See that great cluster of houses, where the windmills are thickest? It was there I was going, had not Terror prevented, to show you the ostriches and how I can race them."

"An ostrich farm? Oh! how interesting! Can't we go, any way?"

Alarico regarded her critically; taking the measure of her endurance, as it were, before he replied:

"It might be a matter of three miles."

In reality it was six; but it was not the lad's way to put anything at its worst unless he could gain some advantage by so doing. This time the advantage was quite on the other side, and beneath all his suavity he was inwardly chafing because he had brought along this stranger, to be a restriction upon the freedom of his own movements.

“Three? It doesn’t look more than the quarter of one to me.”

“That is the atmosphere ; one of the matters the tourists rave about.”

“Poor tourists ! with what supreme contempt you all speak of them ?”

They were now seated upon some rocks which the mat-like pink had covered with its sprays like a great cushion, and Edith was replaiting the loose braid which the wind and the jolting had undone. Alarico watched the operation with interest, thinking how pretty and abundant the fair hair was and that the having such a cousin always at San Rosa would make the place far brighter than he had ever known it. At the same time he wondered how she was going to like it, and again wished that he had left her behind to try.

Suddenly she turned toward him and remarked :

“Don’t look so disconsolate, Alarico ! I’m not going to be a hindrance to you. I’ll either go back or forward, as you decide.”

“So good, yes ? But it is only Terror. If he were here——”

“Let’s sit a while and then go after him.

I'm a great walker. If it's but three miles, that's nothing. I easily do ten—at home."

Her quick guess at his feeling had brought a flush to the lad's cheek, but this subsided and a real regret was in his next words:

"Is it not the home, then, our beloved San Rosa? Are you not Garcelon as well as we? Has your childhood in the colder land made you a Yankee forever? Dona Rosa will be unhappy so. Is it not the blood that is thicker than water, yes? So I hope, Edithe, my cousin."

"Of course it is. Let us have a good talk together, Alarico; and by the way, I never can stop to say all that long name each time I speak. Can't I call you Larry?"

"Whatever the Señorita calls is music."

"Nonsense! Beg pardon, but I'm not used to so many compliments and I don't like them. They make me feel so silly. Let's be sensible. We are the nearest of age in the household and should be the best of friends. There are lots of things I want to ask you. First of all, who and what was the strange old woman who came to my room in the middle of the night and bade me welcome in—in even more extravagant lan-

guage than your own? She frightened me dreadfully."

"Frightened you? She shall be punished!"

"Nothing of the sort. She seemed harmless, and I was frightened but for a moment. Who is she? This Susana, as she called herself?"

"An old Indian woman. One of the many hangers-on at San Rosa. I do not remember when she began to come. She was here at my birth, I believe, and long before. She is not right up here," and he touched his forehead significantly.

"I did not see her this morning, though I was curious to do so."

"You may not again for weeks. Yet I don't know. She has long foretold your arrival, fairest cousin, and that it was to make all different for the old rancho. She said—it is not the impertinence, no? But she said you were to bring wealth in your hands."

"The silly old woman! I wish I might have brought it, if there is need and I fancied—beg pardon, again—that our Grandmother is not herself a wealthy person."

"In the days that are past San Rosa was famous from San Francisco to Sonora. You

shall hear about your people, cousin mine, and hold your golden head the higher ever afterward."

"Oh! my head is high enough, already. Humility is not one of my especial virtues. Well, this is the extent of the riches I have brought!" and she laughingly tossed him her very flat little purse.

He caught it, bowed, and placed it within his own pocket. Then he lay back upon the vines, clasping his hands behind his head and fairly basking in the sunshine which streamed over him, while his dark eyes fixed themselves unblinkingly upon the brilliant sky into which Edith could not glance without squinting. She thought she had never seen any person, except her Grandmother, as handsome as he or as—indolent. In her opinion the indolence rendered the beauty almost repellent. But he began to talk and she immediately forgot all but what he was saying.

"La Profetisa knew the first settler himself. She was his servant. She knew the secrets of this land and one which, she claims, you are to discover. She——."

"But, Larry! That would make her much

over a hundred years old ! I know enough history to compute that."

" Well, so ? Is it not truth ? Are there not many old men and women all about us who are one hundred and ten, fifteen, even one hundred and forty years old ? "

" I wouldn't spoil a good story for the sake of a few years more or less ! "

" Nor I. It is the truth. Upon my honor, the honor of a Garcelon ! "

" Afterward, Edith was to learn that he had but slightly exaggerated and to see in proper person some of these extremely venerable Californians at whose existence she now scoffed.

" Very well. I'll grant she's a thousand, if it will give you any pleasure. Let's get on to the secret I am to discover, and thereby enrich my household. That's what you mean, isn't it ? "

" Yes. But yes, indeed. I have always heard it, always. ' When the daughter of the daughter comes from the north to her own, in her hand will lie the key to an illimitable wealth.' That's the way it is expressed, always. I profess not, I, to understand it ; but I repeat and—I believe."

"You have my purse and here are my hands!" laughed the girl, opening her palms for inspection.

But Alarico merely frowned, and continued to gaze dreamily into the sky. From all appearances he seemed satisfied to thus repose during the whole morning; but Edith put an end to his laziness by remarking:

"I'm ready now for that three mile walk of ours. It may be that your Terror will have exhausted his own wickedness and be willing to behave himself on the road home. Do you think he would go straight to that ostrich farm you pointed out, and where you said you were due? Only, if you have business there, and you prefer, there is still time, for you to tell me so and I'll go back alone."

Alarico sprang to his feet as if indolence were a thing unknown. Bending a merry, yet piercing gaze upon his cousin's face, he demanded:

"Can you keep a secret for me, too, most clever? You who are the holder of a greater mystery? For I would like to tell it—it burns in my heart, when the intelligence that comprehends is so near."

"I'd keep a secret or do any other reasonable thing you ask if you'd only talk common sense."

"Hear, then: I have made a challenge, I, that my Terror can run faster, than the famous ostrich of my neighbor, yonder. Pedro the Second, the only pacing ostrich in California—or, maybe, the whole United States."

"A challenge? That is, you are going to race? For a prize? But that is wicked, Larry, and you'll not take it even if you win?"

"Will I not? What harm? Yet that's as may be. Come. If it is to my sweet cousin to try the walk she will see what she has never seen in the cold country of New England. That is if she can, indeed, make so long a walk. For me, pouf! it is naught. Yet three miles, in the sun, eh?"

"I will show what New England training can do. However, I don't begin in that way. I start very slowly and afterward go as fast as I please."

They set out together, and had it, in reality, been but three miles even Alarico, who hated walking, might have reached their goal unwearied. But he now suffered the penalty of

his own boasting. The further they advanced the further away seemed the group of buildings they sought. These were always in sight yet always receding; and when, at length, the lad paused begging Edith to rest a moment, she turned upon him, indignantly:

“Why did you tell me such a foolish untruth, Larry? That sounds rude and I’m sorry to say it; but I have a habit of counting my footsteps, and I know that we’ve already come much more than the three miles you said. Or am I mistaken in my judgment and were you misinformed?”

“I have not measured the distance in that tiresome way, I——”

“Larry, did you ever walk so far before?”

“For what does my—fair cousin—esteem her servant?” gasped he. For on mischief intent, Edith had led him a sharper pace than ever since her suspicions as to the distance became convictions.

“I esteem you about the very poorest walker I ever knew. I shall have to give you some lessons in the art. But rest now, if you wish. I am eager to see the ostriches, and you mustn’t give out yet.”

“Give out? Own to be beaten by a girl—even though such a girl? But no. Not so;” and he swept her a bow.

“Come on, then; before the day gets even warmer.”

After that they talked no more, but plodded steadily on till they finally reached the entrance to San Pedro; where, when Edith waited for her cousin to inquire about the missing Terror, he merely sank down upon the ground beneath a eucalyptus tree and promptly went to sleep—quite exhausted by his unaccustomed exertions.

CHAPTER XII

A NOVEL RACE

EDITH, also, was very glad to rest, and sat down upon a bench beside her prostrate cousin, while her gaze became instantly riveted upon the scene before her.

“I never saw anything so lovely in my life!” she exclaimed; and few had. For San Pedro was a typical Southern Californian ranch at its best. Its modern, well-constructed buildings were numerous enough to suggest a village, though their similarity of architecture and coloring proved them to belong to one proprietor.

Around the dwelling-house stretched green lawns among which were fountains playing, and until she saw them Edith had not realized how much she had hitherto missed the sight of water from the landscape. Certainly, on this favored bit of soil the precious water must be plentiful enough, for the buildings were half-embowered in vines and the mansion proper seemed as if it

might have been made simply to sustain the weight of roses which clung to it.

"No, never anything one half so lovely. If only Aunt Comfort were here!"

A bustle of life and activity was everywhere, and formed a sharp contrast to the decay and lethargy that had already impressed her so drearily at Santa Rosa. Men, scores of them, in cool and comfortable costumes moved briskly about, while beneath a row of pepper trees shading a courtyard were ranged several vehicles similar to that in which the girl had made her journey from the San Diego station to her grandmother's home. She wondered if all of these belonged to the master of San Pedro, but was not left long in doubt; for an employee hurrying by suddenly discovered Alarico and stopped.

"Well, young man! How happened it your horse came here ahead of you? Just in time, too. Though we began to think some other fellow would have to ride him."

Alarico sat up on the grass, and demanded:

"What do you mean? I'd like to see him try!"

"Mean all right, that if you hadn't come we

shouldn't have put off the race for want of your presence."

"Put off the race? It isn't due for a week yet."

"Are you out of your head? Isn't this the eleventh?"

"No. But it can't be, yes?"

"Yes, but it can be, no;" mocked the ranchman, though without malice. "Half the tourists in the city are here already and the rest are coming. The press reporters, too, and by night-fall all the country will have read the result of the only ostrich race ever ridden in the United States. And you—you lazy Californian, you! Do you mean to say you'd forgotten it?"

"I had made a mistake, yes. But to what end? Am I not here? Is not my Terror arrived? The sooner the better—for I'm going to win!"

"You'll make a good showing, maybe; but you'll no more win this race than I shall; and I am—not going to ride in it."

Apparently, Alarico did not hear this, he certainly did not heed it, for he sprang up excited, energetic, completely transformed. It did not seem to Edith that he and the languid youth

she had hitherto seen could be the same person. He started on a run towards the stables, asking:

“Where have they put him?”

“In a stall of Number Five. A vaquero has groomed him fit to suit the queen.”

All her cousin's gallantry had deserted him, and it was with some amusement that the New Englander looked about her, wondering what she was to do with herself till his return. But the ranchman solved her difficulty by remarking:

“If you like I'll go with you to the house and introduce you to some of the women-folks. The track's off yonder, but a lot of them will be going over before the fun begins.”

“Thank you; but I'd not like to be in the way. Alarico was bringing me to see the ostriches. He said nothing about the race till we were on the way, and he did not, I think, know it was for to-day. Could I not go and look at the birds, without disturbing anybody?”

The man smiled. “There's no danger of being in anybody's way here on San Pedro; and the boss is hospitality itself. I take it the broncho threw you two out of the wagon, didn't he?”

"Yes, somewhere in a cañon, Alarico called it."

"Lucky you aren't dead ; and you must be near that with fatigue if you've walked from that here. However, if you don't care to go to the house, there's a little pavilion at the bird-quarters. You see, it's one of the sights down here, our ostrich farm is ; and so many visitors come to look at them that the boss built a little place for folks to get under cover and yet be able to watch. There's a good view of the track from there, too, and the woman who tends always has a bucket of milk and some biscuit to serve the strangers. Guess that's the best thing you can do."

His manner added : "And I wish you'd do it right away !"

Edith smiled, rose rather stiffly, and walked away with him, doing her utmost to keep pace with his long strides, and answering his brief questions with a corresponding brevity :

"You belong to young Garcelon's family ?"

"Yes."

"Sister ?"

"Cousin."

"Stranger here, ain't you ?"

"Yes."

"Where from?"

"New England."

"Must find this a change."

"Yes."

"What do you think of old San Rosa?"

"It's very picturesque and—gone to ruin."

"Right you are. One of the show places of the region, same as this is. Couldn't be a greater contrast, though. Shame. They ought to be as rich as kings if they only had sense."

"Are you speaking of my people?"

"Yes. Meaning no offense, but they will stand in their own light so. Best lay of land in the county theirs is, but just plain worthless without water."

"How could they get water?"

"Easy. Irrigate. But, there, you'll think I'm meddling. I'm not. I like that Alarico, lazy as he is, and if he'd only take as much interest in sensible things as he does in petty, foolish ones, he'd make the old place as good as new. Easy. There! That's the pavilion. Just go right in and ask the woman there for a drink of milk, or anything you want. She'll

make you comfortable and show you a good place to see the fun. Good-by."

The ranchman raised his hat, as courteously as if it were not a ragged one and he a common helper on a western ranch, and hurried away. Yet it was not exactly like hurry after all, but a habit of making every moment and movement tell. This same haste without waste was apparent about every person belonging to San Pedro, as Edith soon discovered, and was, had she known it, one of the firmest rules the ranch owner had established for the conduct of his large force of employees.

Even the woman at the ostrich pavilion, who was quite alone there as yet, seemed to have no time for loitering, though she approached Edith with a friendly smile, and the inquiry :

"Please tell me what I can do for you ?"

"I would be grateful for a drink of some sort. Water or milk. The man said I could find it here."

"Surely."

The young woman paused in her task of sorting some very dirty-looking feathers to fetch the pitcher of milk and a plate of biscuits, which she set before the girl with a kindly nod.

“Help yourself, please. We’re pretty busy here, to-day. All the time for that matter, though not like this. It’s the race, you see. It has been so well advertised and everybody is coming from the city, seems to me. It’s the height of the tourist season and they’re all always agog for new sights. Don’t blame them, either. Are you a tourist?”

“Oh, no, indeed! I’m just a—I’ve come to California to live with my grandmother.”

“It’s a pleasant country. But—it’s a great way from home;” said the other, lightly tapping the table with a long, light brown plume.

“Everybody seems so friendly.”

“Ought to be, I’m sure. Well. Do you think these feathers are as pretty as you expected?”

“I think they are—horrid.”

The attendant laughed. She was a clean, wholesome looking middle-aged body, in a neat gingham gown and spotless apron, while a dainty, be-ribboned cap set off her waving hair. She was so trim and brisk and sociable that Edith could not help contrasting her with the dowdy and melancholy Ysidra, who ruled over the domestic affairs at Santa Rosa. But she in-

stantly dismissed the thought as ungrateful, or disloyal, and began to learn what she could about this, to her, new industry of ostrich farming.

"But you're as disappointed in the feathers as everybody else is. I see that. They do look dirty and almost worthless to strangers. Now, what would you say this becrumpled thing was worth?"

"I wouldn't give five cents for it!" laughed the girl, taking it in her hand and stroking it gently. Then she began to realize how soft it was, how broad and full the barbs; and added: "That shows, I suppose, just how ignorant I am. The few ostrich plumes I've seen haven't looked a bit like this."

"That is one of the finest we ever pulled. When it is dressed and made up it will be worth at least fifteen dollars. Even as it is I doubt if the manager will let it go under five dollars, though a good price is a dollar and a half, for ordinary run. Indeed, some don't fetch nearly so much."

"Is it the dressing that makes them look as they do in the stores? And do you fix them right here at the farm?"

"No. We sell them as they are, fresh. Getting them ready for market is another part of the industry. Now, if you like, I'll show you the birds themselves."

Edith accompanied the woman to a long row of paddocks where the adult birds were kept singly, and received from the lips of her new acquaintance, "enough information in about five minutes to make me a practical ostrich-farmer, myself," as she afterward described the affair in a home letter.

Then she was left to watch and study the great creatures, and to become so interested in them that she scarcely noticed how large a crowd of other visitors was gathering about her. When she did she returned to the pavilion and was assigned a fine seat for observation by the woman who presided over it, and who appeared to have taken as great a fancy to the girl as Edith had to her.

For a time thereafter she was unconscious of her surroundings. Out upon a smooth track, whose circle reminded her of such seen at a county fair, were drawn up in line; one of the ostriches, wearing a light harness and hitched before a trotting gig; a man on a bicycle; and

—her cousin Alarico ! He bestrode Terror as if the little beast had never been anything but amiable and worthy of its rider's confidence.

From somewhere the lad had secured a jaunty cap and a gay scarf, and sat his diminutive steed as if he felt himself much admired and altogether admirable. But he seemed to be searching among the sea of faces, which had now gathered about the track and on a raised platform near it, for some one whom he did not see ; and fancying this to be herself Edith arose in her place and frantically waved her handkerchief.

After a moment this caught his eye and rising in his stirrups he waved his red cap in return and made a most profound obeisance. Then she saw him take something brown from his belt and wave that, also, toward her.

“The silly boy ! That looks—it looks—like my hair-ribbon that blew off into the wagon and he picked up. I do believe he thinks he's a knight and that's his lady's token ! My ! what a task I'll have to make him act like other folks ! But he is handsome and—I suppose it's wicked, I don't believe grandfather'd like it, but I can't help hoping he'll win !”

Then they were off, and because she obstructed their view, some persons behind her pulled Edith down into her seat. But she did not look around. She had eyes only for those oddly matched contestants, and felt a distinct disappointment when at the conclusion of the first circuit, the gigantic bird came easily in ahead of his competitors.

"Don Pedro will be good for a short distance, but if they keep it up he'll fall behind," said somebody; and Edith's hope revived.

The prophecy was a true one. At the end of the second circuit the bird was about even with the horse and the wheel; and the third and final trial was waited for in breathless expectancy.

To a girl as enthusiastic as Edith there was something irresistible in the excitement all about her. The shouts and cheers thrilled her, and quite unconscious of what she was doing she shouted and cheered with the rest.

People rose in their places, and she, also. Necks were craned forward, hats came off and were waved aloft; even the women unfurled their parasols and joined in the general outcry.

"Pedro's ahead! Pedro! Pedro!"

“The wheel! the bicycle! Cheer the wheelman!”

“The broncho has it! the broncho! hurrah! The plucky little beast!”

When only about a quarter of the course remained to be run the ostrich suddenly stopped. Stopped short and square, nor could the efforts of his driver make him budge an inch. By his own choice he had put himself out of the race, and a disappointed howl arose from throats already hoarse with yelling. However, it was only for an instant that attention was distracted before it returned to the horseman and the wheelman. For a few rods there was a tie between these two; then, very gradually, Terror gained. As he did so he seemed to realize his own advantage and to make a humanly intelligent “spurt” to increase it.

“The broncho! The little broncho! He wins—Terror wins!”

The shouts and yells and cheers redoubled as the horseman passed the stake a few lengths in advance of the wheelman; and there was unlimited admiration for the handsome, Spanish-looking youth who stepped from his saddle, bowing gracefully and continuously toward all

points of that circle of spectators. Yet he finally selected one spot for his profoundest salutation, and toward that he waved a long brown ribbon.

Then many eyes turned from him to the fair-haired girl in the ragged sombrero, who had quite forgotten what was on her head, and smiled at her enthusiasm. When she at length realized that she was thus observed she blushed and dropped back into her place, while a thin hand clutched her sleeve and a voice, unmistakably familiar addressed her from the rear :

“ Well, Edith Hale, when you’ve done saluting the victor, please say how-de-do to me ! ”

“ Why—Mrs.—Eastman ! ”

CHAPTER XIII

JOY AND GRIEF

“SURPRISED to see me, are you? Well, you needn’t be, though I am to find you here. All the world’s at San Pedro to-day, to see this unique race. Who is that insolently handsome lad who won it? He seemed to know you and is coming—this moment, I declare! to present his honors to you.”

“He is my cousin, Alarico Garcelon. The oddest boy I ever knew. But isn’t it fine that he won? I just want to shout again, I am so glad about it.”

“Humph. What would the good old grand-sire up in New England say about your attending such a thing as a horse-race? Even though it is one where no money is concerned.”

“May be he would not be pleased; and yet—I wish he could have seen it. I wish they all could, and that Aunt Comfort, who so dearly loves flowers, could get one glimpse of all this

beauty before us. Just think. At this very moment it may be snowing furiously at home."

"Doubtless it is. But come. I'm going to have luncheon, and if you like you may invite your fantastic relative to join us in it. Indeed, it will make us quite envied of our neighbors at table if we dine with the winner."

At that moment Alarico came up to them, and bowing low before his cousin presented to her the brown hair-ribbon which he declared :

"Has won me the prize, no? But yes. Old Susana is right. You have brought luck with you, and the days of our prosperity return. I put myself at your feet, I become your slave, no?"

"Most decidedly no! You silly, silly boy. Why can't you talk as sensibly as you can act? But I'm so glad you won? Oh! I forgot. Beg pardon, Madam Eastman, this is Alarico. Larry I call him, for it makes him seem more like other folks."

The lady fixed her keen eyes on the youth, who immediately seized her hand and bowed over it, just as he had Edith's, and the recipient of his courtesy smiled grimly. Then she remarked :

“Maybe you’ll not feel so well inclined to ward me when you hear that I am the Eastman who owns the land adjoining yours and the one who has given your people so much trouble about the irrigation.”

“Ah! but that is the business, yes. This is the pleasure. In society we recognize only the delight and honor which is from the new acquaintance of my new cousin, Edithe. It is hoped that the charming Señora has enjoyed the slight effort her servants have made to entertain her.”

Madam nodded, as if she but half knew that she was doing so, coolly raised her lorgnette and surveyed the Californian, much as she would have scrutinized some curious animal. Then she turned toward Edith and smiled, remarking:

“I thought all that sort had disappeared, along with the other antiquities of the country. But this remnant—I fancy he’s harmless.”

The girl flushed. To her it seemed impossible but that Alarico’s feelings should be wounded, and she glanced toward him in great anxiety. Yet she need not have feared. He was already bowing and smiling among a group of utter strangers who had drawn near to stare at him,

in his quaint costume, and to ask him a lot of senseless questions concerning himself, his broncho, and the race. There are always such persons to be found in any gathering and Alarico was hugely enjoying the attention bestowed upon him.

Madam Eastman gazed at him again, with that odd scrutiny of hers, and having finally satisfied herself, slipped her arm within Edith's and set out for the luncheon tables which had been spread under the trees beside the dwelling-house.

She called back over her shoulder:

"Come and get your dinner, boy! Since Edith has brought you good luck she deserves some attention at your hands."

So Alarico bowed and apologized, and finally tore himself away from the strangers who were flattering him so openly—so delightfully, and followed as he was bidden. Yet even that short walk, from the pavilion to the house, was a little journey of triumph, and as such gave a finishing touch to the lad's vanity. His head tossed, he cast his languishing glances from side to side, and began to hum a Spanish air as jauntily as if he were alone in his own room.

After a little the smiles of admiration changed to those of derision, and though he did not notice this difference, Edith did, and was heartily thankful when he at last reached their table and the seat which Madam Eastman had reserved for him close beside her own.

That lady was quick to see the distress in Edith's manner and set about entertaining the arrogant youth as sincerely as if he had been some really noteworthy person whom it was to her interest to propitiate. And, indeed, in some measure this later fact was true; and she began speaking to Alarico:

"In all my efforts to meet your people I have been unsuccessful. The Señora Garcelon has always been engaged; the Dona Ysidra, understood no business; the Dona Dolores was at the Mission; the Señor Garcelon was at sea; there have been a hundred and one excuses and my agent has accomplished nothing. It is not, you see, as if many others were interested with me. The project for which I am working is all my own; and like most projects of lonely old women is laughed at rather than approved. Yet, if I live, I'm bound to carry it out. Hear me."

Quoth Alarico, with his hand on his heart:

"But the Señora Eastman does herself the wrong. Old, is it? But no. The years which lie before should be as many as those which are behind, is it not?"

"No. It is not. You are a silly boy, as Edith called you, but a charming fellow. I like to be flattered. There is nothing I more greatly enjoy. Keep it up. You and I are destined to be good friends, and that is what I want. Come, Edith. Try this salad. It is fine. Go on, Alarico. I'm waiting for another nice speech."

But for once the lad's ready flow of compliment failed. He thought this old lady very unprepossessing yet he liked her. So sincerely that he ceased to be dramatic and became sensible. After a moment he replied:

"I would rather hear you talk, if you please."

This was so like other, plainer people that Edith stared; but the wise old body opposite took no notice and presently began to comment upon their surroundings and to explain that all the prosperity so evident was due to simple common sense and a "determination to get away from tradition."

"Why, dear Mrs. Eastman, what do you mean by that?"

"It's an interesting story, I think. The owner of this great ranch came to it when it was just a barren strip of land. It was a strip that nobody else seemed to want but which he did not believe had been made for nothing. He resolved to take it and do what he could with it. You see the result. He has not only enriched himself, but he has furnished a livelihood for hundreds of other people."

"It is very fine, that ;" said Alarico, with eagerness.

"Why don't you do the same, then ?"

The Madam's sudden demand was startling.

"I?—I comprehend not, I."

"I will explain. You are the eldest of your family, I believe."

"But, yes," said the youth, straightening himself proudly.

"Well then it devolves upon you to make San Rosa another San Pedro."

"Let the charming Señora bid me turn night into day and I will oblige her the sooner, no ?"

"I'm not asking miracles, but simply that you persuade your grandmother to have a personal interview with me. "I'm not half as black as

I'm painted, and I wish well to Santa Rosa, as also to myself."

"I will ask and——"

"She will refuse. Of course. She always has. But she'll have to come to terms sometime. I'm not going to let so many people lose a lot of benefit just because one cranky old woman acts like a mule."

Both Edith and Alarico sprang up, indignant, and the girl exclaimed :

"I am sure you don't know what you are saying. My grandmother—our grandmother, Larry's and mine—have you ever seen her?"

"At a distance, yes. But sit down again. We want to get through and start home. Neither am I as disrespectful as you think. I'm an old woman myself and a cranky one, too. But I try to turn my crank the right way—not the wrong. I'm positive if the Dona Rosalia would give me a chance to talk with her for a half-hour she would come right around to my point of view. I'm told she is a very religious person."

"Oh! very. Is it not all the time she spends at her devotions, no?"

"I should like to know what it is all about!"

cried Edith, who found the talk between the other two a riddle she could not solve.

"Simply this. I own the land adjoining Santa Rosa. I want to irrigate and make it useful to somebody. Indeed, I have a pretty big scheme in my head which she prevents my carrying out by her obstinacy."

"How? If you don't know her."

"Ah! but I do know her. In another sense and to my sorrow. She belongs to the old 'Californians,' a race in itself almost extinct. She lives up to her traditions. Alarico is copying, I see. They believe, these Garcelons, that they are a little better than their neighbors in the world and that it is for them to dictate, not the others. They cling to everything that is old and hate everything which is new and progressive. I shouldn't mind that if this hoary old prejudice didn't interfere with that pet plan of mine."

"What is that?"

"I want water. No, not a glass full, but a country full. Away up to the north there is a company which would furnish me with this water if I could secure to it the right of way, so to speak. You old Garcelons are land poor.

There are literally miles of your land stretching between mine and that spot where water is obtainable, and you are so pig-headed that you won't allow even yourselves to be benefited by letting this water be brought down over your land into mine. Now, why can't you see reason?"

The lady had become excited over her own words and addressed the two young people as if they, personally, were responsible for the state of things which she deplored, and her hand trembled even more than common. She looked exceedingly frail, at that moment, and Edith remembered how kind she had been to her on the way across the continent. She ceased to resent the manner in which her beautiful grandmother had been mentioned or that she herself had been called pig-headed. She resolved to bring about the much-desired interview, if it were possible, but asked, that she might better understand the situation:

"When did you try to see my grandmother, Madam Eastman?"

"A year ago, I suppose. But my agent has kept at her ever since, in my absence and by my authority. I suppose I shall have to wait

for her to die; but I may be dead myself by that time!"

"And I think it is time to go home! How are we to get there, Larry?"

How, indeed! Since the wagon lay broken in the distant cañon and the broncho was surely too small to carry double. It did not enter Edith's mind, any more than it did Alarico's, that he should give up his own use of the horse for his cousin's benefit. That was a point beyond even his extravagant courtesy. Madam Eastmen saw their perplexity and inquired:

"How did you get here?"

Edith promptly told the whole story, and her friend remarked:

"Well, even if you could both ride the one horse, you should not risk your life with him a second time. Mind, Alarico Garcelon, Californian, I take an interest in this Yankee cousin of yours and there's to be no more tomfoolery of that sort. Hunt her up a decent little burro, sometime if you like, and she may ride that; but that Terror—never. It's all right, now though. There's room enough in my carriage, or in Eleazer Mason's. He brought me

out, with another lady who is to remain for the night; and he'll be only too glad to take you to Santa Rosa. He kept talking all morning of your wonderful qualities. Go, Alarico, and hunt him up. Tell him I'm ready to go and that I've a pleasant surprise for him. Be as quick as possible. I hate waiting."

It was perfectly natural to the lady that she should order people to do her bidding without stopping to ask if they were willing; and somewhat to Edith's surprise her cousin obeyed quite as naturally.

But Eleazer had himself espied the little party under the trees and was on the watch for the first signal his patroness might make. He had also seen Edith during the race and had watched her animated face with delight. He felt almost a personal proprietorship in her, for Eli's sake, and he came beaming toward them now, so hearty and hospitable, that the girl's own face lighted as at sight of an old friend.

"Well, I declare! If this don't beat all! Well, I guess. You're a regular Yankee for get-up-and-getness, ain't you, little girl! Hain't been here no time, yet right on deck to see all the shows that are going! That is right.

That's just right. That's the way to get some good out of life. But I must say, I didn't seem to think things would turn this way. I sort of reckoned you'd be kept rather tight shut up, at San Rosy. Ain't much for mixing with the common herd, them Garcelons ain't."

Madam Eastman did not interrupt her coachman's flow of language, but calmly waited till he paused for breath, then dryly remarked:

"If you've wind enough left, Eleazer, just help me to the carriage. No. I don't want it driven here. I want to go to it. Then I wish you should make a tour of the ranch and give our girl a chance to see what a little water will do in California. I may want her for a witness to my interview with the Señora."

The hackman looked astonished, whistled, and marched off with his hands in his pockets and an amused expression on his rugged face.

"Like as not. Like as not," he assured himself. "She's pretty enough and plucky enough, too, to carry her point if she's a mite of show. Well, for my part, I think Californy'll be a brighter place since that yellow-headed girl has come to live in it. Pshaw! she's stirred up my old heart so that I mean to really set down

and write a letter to Eli myself. 'Pears as if I could hear him whining and complaining 'at I'd got all the best angle-worms after he'd dug 'em for bait. And the old shady pool! My, my! Queer, how old times makes a man feel when something brings 'em back. And she's got right into the thick of it, too. To my certain knowledge Madam's been trying this five years to get a word in person with the top-lofty Señory, but no, sir! No, siree! I'm a Garcelon! Every other man, woman, or child in the Golden State is of no more account than a horned toad, compared to me! That's the idee. That's the way they've lived. Whew! won't the fur fly when them two old tabbies meet! Glad I'm going to be at the show!"

While these thoughts were running through the pioneer's mind he was getting his team ready for the tour of the ranch, which his patroness desired; as well as for the long, roundabout drive back to the city, a wide detour having to be made in order to take in Santa Rosa.

Then he helped the Madam to seat herself comfortably, with all her various wraps and parcels—not one of which she had needed—and Edith stepped to the empty place beside her.

Alarico was to join them as they left the ranch and ride beside the carriage to his home—provided Terror was willing so to do. For, as he had proved earlier in the day, he was a broncho of many vagaries and not to be depended upon with any certainty.

Almost an hour was spent in driving from point to point of interest on the great ranch, and Edith had her first glimpse of olive, lemon and raisin industries. For all of these were carried on at San Pedro, and each formed a business by itself. She was given a great branch of oranges which had broken from the parent tree by its own weight, and when she stepped down to walk through the olive orchard to the curing-vats beyond, Madam Eastman called her attention to a sign at the entrance:

“HELP YOURSELF!”

“Why don’t you do it, my dear?”

“Won’t they really care?”

“Surely not. Else why the sign?”

“They do look inviting!”

They did, indeed, like plums in the old garden at home. Too tempting to be resisted, even

though Eleazer did remark, from simple kindness :

“Some folks don’t care for olives.”

A moment later Edith felt that she didn’t. She had plucked a few of the bluest and finest, and had sampled one with eager haste. Alas ! the bitter flavor remained with her for a good part of that homeward drive, and when she indignantly demanded why such a practical joke should be played upon strangers, he laughed and answered :

“It’s just a case of worm-turning. The pesky towerists come here in droves and swarms and seem to have left their own common-sense behind ’em. Don’t wonder a mite your grandma hates ’em. They seem to think that our Californy is a big show just got up to amuse them, and they ask more questions to the square minute than a lifetime could answer. That’s why, I reckon, the San Pedro boss thought he’d kill ’em with kindness. Oh ! they’re welcome, sure enough. But not to come and take a day of a man’s time that the boss has to pay for, just gratifying their cur’osity. My, my, there is more foolish sort of talkin’ done than you can shake a stick at.”

"Quite true, Eleazer, and some of the talkers come even from that favored state of New Hampshire," said the Madam, quietly.

Edith saw nothing out of ordinary in this remark, but evidently, the hackman did, for he spoke no more until the carriage had come in sight of Santa Rosa, from another direction than that by which Edith had reached it on the previous day.

"There she is from a different side. Must have been a great place once, eh?"

"Oh! it must have been beautiful! Were all those fields, that bare brown stretch—the mesa, is it?—was that ever green and like an eastern meadow?"

Alarico was full of pride over his victory, and from time to time took out a leather purse and waved it aloft. This, he explained to the others, contained the wonderful sum of three hundred dollars that he had won in the race.

"Won in the race! I don't understand that. Betting is strictly forbidden at San Pedro and any races held on the ranch are merely to advertise the ostriches or fine stock raised there. Incidentally, maybe, to amuse us idle 'tourists.'

How came you by that money, Alarico? The truth, please, and exactly."

The lad flushed but promptly replied to Madam Eastman's question:

"Honestly, fair lady. It was the sum offered by the outsiders, the visitors themselves, no? All rules are made to break, is it not? And what goes on behind the master's back is not of his affair. Men may be good servants yet keep to their own ways still. Caramba! Would I have taken all that trouble just for a few empty cheers? Indeed, no. But this—this—Ah! it means much to the house of Garcelon;" and again he waved the purse before them.

This incident greatly disturbed both Madam Eastman and Edith, and the former earnestly exclaimed:

"Money gained by gambling, by wrong-doing, will bring no blessing with it. Go back, lad, and return it at once."

His scornful laugh was his only reply, as he rode gaily forward; and now in complete silence the others followed his course.

Yet when the surrey stopped before the courtyard the happy group of children which

had welcomed it yesterday was wholly missing. Indeed, though they could not have explained why, there seemed a strange difference in the atmosphere, and it might have been the abode of the dead, so far as any sound was heard.

Terror had quietly walked away to his own quarters, and when Edith helped Madam Eastman to alight and led her up the tangled pathway toward the porch she almost hushed her own voice as she remarked :

“You will find my grandmother a perfect gentlewoman. No matter what her feelings may be she will receive you courteously and, if it is for the best, her best as well as yours, I hope she’ll assent to your plan.”

“She’ll be a simpleton if she doesn’t,” was the answer; and with this they came to the door.

But it was an unexpected sight which greeted them. The beautiful Dona Rosalia sat white and motionless in her great chair, while upon her breast lay the disheveled head of rough Ysidra. Around them were the awestruck and silent children, gazing wonderingly at this unusual spectacle; while the lately jubilant Alarico lay prone on the floor, with his hands

clenched in his hair, and great sobs shaking his slight body through all its length.

“Grandmother! Aunt Ysidra! what is the matter? oh! what is it?” cried Edith, moving forward in affright.

But though she repeated her question again and again nobody saw fit to answer.

CHAPTER XIV

A DREARY OUTLOOK

MADAM EASTMAN leaned against the doorpost and gazed upon her "enemy," the woman whose will had been set against her own for all these years, and her heart melted with pity. There was sorrow in that old salon and of a kind with which the petty differences of life had small concern. When she saw that to Edith's pleading no reply was given, she herself passed inward and laid a light touch upon the shoulder of the Señora. Some intuition, born of her own lonely heart moved her to say :

"The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be His name."

A shiver ran through the rigid figure and a dry sob parted the Señora's lips. Then she looked up, but quite without surprise and asked in a whisper :

"How did you hear of it, friend?"

For to the bereaved there is always a feeling that all the world must suffer with them.

"No matter. You should not hold that heavy woman. Let me take her from you."

"She was his wife. She is a widow—and all these babes. I shall soon go to him; but she must live, and these are but beginning."

"Oh! grandmother! Is it my sailor uncle? Has anything——"

Ysidra lifted herself from her mother-in-law's arms and her face seemed in some manner changed; refined—Edith thought it. The poor woman had lived for many years at Santa Rosa, during which she had toiled faithfully for the comfort of her husband's household. Yet she had never presumed to look upon it as her own. She was of a humbler class than his. She felt that he had done her honor enough in marrying her; she was quite content to serve; and in whatever of joy had hitherto been hers she had not asked their sympathy. Never before had the arms of her Alarico's mother been clasped about her, but they had done so now, with a love and tenderness which amazed her. For the moment this surprise almost deadened her grief.

As Ysidra left the room Edith followed and slipped her own arm about her aunt's waist, asking quietly:

"Can you tell me about it? I am so sorry, so sorry. It's—awful—and I wish you could."

"A man, another sailor, my husband's friend, brought the word this morning. You and Alarico had just ridden away over the mesa. It was a shipwreck. I knew it. I knew it always. This would be the end. I told him. I begged him to stay. But it was ever the sea that was more to him than all the world beside. It was three months ago, on the other side the earth."

"And they did not find him? He will not be brought home to you, to rest with his people?"

"But no. On the bottom of the sea it is as quiet as under the poppies. Where he rests, he rests. But—it is to me alone."

She withdrew herself from the girl's embrace and passed onward into her kitchen within whose blank walls almost all her dull life had been spent. The blow which had fallen upon her had stunned her by its suddenness, yet it would make little change in her outward circumstances; save that—and this thought came with a fresh shock—there would no longer be the sailor's wage to furnish the household support.

She had loved her husband as a being superior to herself, but he had been with her only at brief intervals since first she came a bride to Santa Rosa, unwelcomed, though "for Alarico's sake" received. A few times each year his ship, his own real home, had touched at the near-by harbor, and he had spent some days or weeks, as the case might be, at the old adobe; leaving it cheerfully enough whenever the Catalina was again ready for sea.

Even her children seemed to her more his than hers. Were they not Garcelons all? Save little Marta, who was quite a daughter after her own sort and the only one of all her brood to whom the lonely mother turned now in her sorrow. It was Marta who had followed them, and, as Edith paused, repulsed at the threshold of the kitchen, ran to her mother's side sobbing as if her heart would break, yet uttering no word of complaint or grief.

Feeling herself a stranger again, Edith hurried back to the place where she had left the others, and to her surprise heard the Señora talking freely and familiarly with Madame Eastman.

"Yes," she was saying; "he was the only son. Others there were who died in childhood.

He only lived; and when he married—was not my heart broken, yes? But it healed; and now—there is no healing. I am alone, bereft. Am I not glad that my own end draws near? That you can see, as I see in your own face that you, too, have sorrowed. You come a stranger, with compassion in your hand. I know not whence; for you have been sent.”

“Yes, Señora, I have been sent; and who I am does not matter yet. Only, you who are so good, should not say that you are alone with all these young creatures about you. Are there not others, too? Daughters? As for me, I am literally alone. I have nobody, not one.”

Edith fancied that the old lady's eyes were roaming wistfully over the group of beautiful children, and that there was a sort of envy in the glance. They were so in contrast, these two venerable women; the one making herself as old as she could and the other persisting in remaining young.

“There is Dolores, yes. She is a teacher, a nurse. She is at the Mission, and comes to Santa Rosa now and then, whenever she is at liberty. She is so good, so noble, my Dolores, yes. She must be told and if it does not inter-

fere with duty she will come to me now, is it not? Alarico?"

"Oh! grandmother!" cried the lad, springing up and bending over her hand. "I will not have it! It is a lie. The man has lied. Where is he?"

"He went as he came, but it is truth. Alarico, the first, now; heart's dearest. Take the children away. Then ride to the Hospital and tell our Dolores."

But Madam Eastman interposed. "We are going directly into the city. Cannot you trust your message with me? I will most gladly deliver it for you, and I know the Mission schools well."

The chamois purse or bag in which the lad had carried his prize money fell to the floor as he stooped again over the Señora's hand, and his chin quivered in a truly boyish fashion. All his silly mannerisms had ceased, and he was not at all ashamed of the tears that flowed as he picked up the purse and placed it in Dona Rosalia's lap.

"So? What is that, my brave one?"

"Money, Grandmother."

"Money? How came you by it, nino?"

There was evident anxiety in her tone and she half-pushed the purse aside as if it were an evil thing.

“Oh, si? It’s all right this time, Beloved. It was a surprise, a pleasure, I was bringing. Edith, my cousin, knows. I was so proud, so happy, and now—I hate it!”

The Señora heard him indifferently, her thoughts already reverting to her own grief; and, as if she could no longer bear the presence of so many people, she rose and moved toward the door. Half-way across the room she paused and extended one hand in gratitude to Madam Eastman, while she passed the other wearily across her forehead. She seemed confused but very gentle, and remarked:

“We are no longer strangers, we. By and by, when time has made the sorrow more familiar, yes, come again to Santa Rosa. It was hospitable once and is still something better than a staring place for unmannerly tourists. Peace follow you and comfort. Adios.”

Thus the “enemies” met and parted, and if good Eleazer Mason could have witnessed the interview, as he had desired, he would have been too astonished even to whistle.

Edith went with her friend to the carriage, dreading to see her go. It seemed as if this must be some other day from that bright morning on which she had cheered and shouted for her victorious cousin. The sunshine seemed to have grown dull and the brown mesa became a desert to shut her in with everything that was dismal. Her face expressed her feeling and the hackman inquired:

"Not to be, say, curious, what's happened? Was the Seenory more top-lofty than you could stand? I declare, you look as if you'd just come from a funeral."

"We have," said Madam Eastman, tersely.

"Wh-a-t?"

Edith explained; and the old lady added:

"We are to go to the Charity Hospital and notify Nurse Dolores. Her place is at her home now, if anywhere."

"Doubt if she sees it that way, though, Ma'am. My, my! Why, I've seen that Sailor Garcelon many's the time. Used to ride into town on the broncho most every day when his ship was in port. A genial fellow he was, too, and not so much of the family stuck-up-ness about him. Pshaw, pshaw! That's too bad.

Too bad. And all them pretty little tackers left to face the world without a father."

His regret was sincere and he helped Madam Eastman back to her place with a preoccupied expression. Finally, he was impelled to say:

"I don't want to add no more worries to what you've got, little Edith, but looks to me as if you'd been sent here in the nick of time. There never was no real head to that family, I guess; not since the old Señor died. That's your grandfather, you know. The old lady spends most of her time reading and praying, and that one daughter of hers spends all hers looking after other folk's youngsters and letting her own kin go untrained. Meanin' no disrespect, for everybody has got to live according to her lights. But you watch out for Alarico. He's a case. If you can, you get him to hand that money right square over to his ma. She ain't over clever, some think, but she's the mainstay of the family. If she once gets it she may be able to hold on to it, and it'll come in mighty handy, no matter if it was come by against rules. The more, if their regular supply is cut off, small as that was. You try to get the money out of the boy's hands into Seenory Ysidra's or there'll be more trouble."

“What sort of trouble, Mr. Mason? Please say it out plainly, so I can know just what to fear.”

“Soon as that fellow gets a little over the shock he’ll remember that three hundred dollars and what a smart one he was to win it. Then he’ll want to go to town and show it to the boys, his chums, you know. If he does that once, it’s gone. Same’s as if it never was.”

“How could it go? What could a boy like him do with three hundred dollars? I hope he will give it back to its real owners.”

“Not he. He’ll spend it in foolishness; in the same spirit that made him ride against the ostrich and the wheel. Yes, ma’am, I’ve done. Maybe I’ve said more’n I ought, but I know that Alarico, as does ’most everybody else in San Diego. And this here little kit is one of my own state folks. I’m bound to take care of her whether or no. Yes, I’m ready. Good-by. I’ll see you soon again, Edith. Good-by.”

“Oh! why did I cheer him! Why didn’t I understand that it wasn’t right? I knew grandfather wouldn’t have approved, and I suppose that once winning will make poor Larry try again; and he’ll come to depend on that instead

of doing any real work, or study, or business. Well, I'll go in now and see if I can't help somebody. It seems as if this grief of my new relatives had shut me away from them. Though I am so sorry, so sorry."

She hurried in and found Alarico ready enough to talk; of his father first; and, from this to drift on to all sorts of family affairs, ending with:

"We're poor enough now, we Garcelons, that used to be so rich. The very richest family once, in all the Californias."

"Oh! Alarico! Truly? That is saying a great deal."

"Well, one of the richest, yes. What does it matter since all is gone? I, only, am left. I am Alarico, the first, now."

"The head of the family," said Edith, quietly.

"Yes. Why not? I have been that, always, when my father was away. Now it will be quite the same with—with a difference, no?"

"With a very grave difference. The family always depends upon its head for support and guidance. You will have to be very wise, and industrious, and careful now."

Alarico fidgeted. He thought it a pity his pretty cousin should spoil her red lips by saying such dull things as these. He took the chamois bag from his blouse and tossed it carelessly from hand to hand. Then he opened the mouth of it and let the shining coins roll out upon the window ledge where he sat.

Even Edith could not repress a cry of admiration, for these were eagles and double eagles fresh from the mint, and they glittered bewitchingly.

"How fine it looks! I think clean gold money is ever so much nicer than the dirty bills we use in the east. It seems as if it were more real and I should hate to spend it. Has Aunt Ysidra seen it?"

"But no. She was—how could I talk of this when the other is so fresh? Is not one sorrow enough at a time?"

"One sorrow—of course. But now you will have to go to work and help her. I suppose one of the hardest things she will have to bear is to know there is no longer any regular provision for you children."

"Children? I am not a child, I."

"Let's go show it to her," suggested the girl,

rising; "then you must take it back as Madam said."

He sprang up with alacrity, but stayed her progress by a negative wave of his hand.

"I will go, yes. But you—Pardon, heart's dearest, yet you are still a stranger. My mother—my mother—I will go to her but you remain. You should lie down and rest. The day has been a hard one and you need siesta, is it not? By and by, I will come back. Then we will talk further of—many things."

Edith could not force her company upon him, and she felt that he was right in his considering her a stranger. But she had no wish for this siesta, which seemed so natural a thing to Alarico, and even to her grandmother; therefore she returned to the room where the children had been assembled around their mother. They had left the place now and were wandering aimlessly about the old garden, confused by the trouble which had come upon their people but not yet understanding it. So she joined her younger cousins among the roses and, drawing them about her, told them stories of her old home until the sudden falling of the twilight warned her that they should go in.

They led the way themselves into the great dining-room, their healthy appetites informing them that it was supper-time. Indeed, Ysidra was arranging the bowls and platter of porridge, as stolid of manner as ever. She had yielded to her grief for a time, but there were duties to be done and duty had always held first place in Ysidra Garcelon's simple nature. With a thrill of pity for her, Edith went swiftly to her aunt's side, begging:

"Please let me do this for you, Aunt Ysidra. You go and—and rest."

The woman looked up, surprised. A faint flush rose to her face, then she answered curtly:

"I need no help, I."

"Do you not? I should be so glad to be of use. Where is Larry? I mean Alarico."

"It is not a woman's place to watch the outgoings of her men. My husband came and went at his own pleasure, yes. It was always right. His son must take his place. I am no spy upon him, handsome fellow, no."

Repulsed again yet growing all the more determined to make friends with this unfriendly creature, Edith asked another question.

"Wasn't it fine that he should win—win the

race? Did he tell you how splendidly the broncho ran and how excited everybody was, and how they all congratulated him?"

The mother looked up at last, with a keen interest.

"I do not understand you, no. He told me no tales. I heard of no race, I."

"Oh! I wish he would. I must find him and persuade him. I think it would please you to hear, and I wish—I wish it were right for you to keep all that shining gold. It would be such a help. Three hundred dollars."

She had meddled now for good or ill, and with some trepidation the tale-bearer watched her aunt's changing expression; she was hardly prepared for the sudden excitement that the mother displayed.

"Three hundred dollars! You mean it? He had it? He won it? Yes?"

"Yes. Truly. Wait. I will tell you."

Ysidra's hand trembled so that the spoon dropped from it. Even little Marta had never seen her so moved, as she cried again:

"Three hundred dollars—a fortune! Food for many months. My guardian angel has sent it! Child, where is your brother, where?"

“He rode away on Terror, my mother. To the city I think. But maybe not—maybe not.”

The widow threw up her hands with a gesture of despair. Then she dropped them again and without another word went on with the supper getting.

The Dona Rosalia did not appear again that night and, after sending the other children to bed. Ysidra took Marta and withdrew to a distant room. Thus left alone Edith also sought her own chamber, that looked far less inviting than on the day before; and she sat down by the window feeling very lonely and homesick, thinking:

“I don’t wonder that even strangers pitied my coming here. How can I stay? And ought I, must I?”

“Let the daughter of her people be glad, not sad. She has come with blessing, yes,” murmured a voice outside the window.

“Old Profetisa again!” cried the girl springing up.

CHAPTER XV

WHILE THE RAIN DESCENDED

"WHAT do you mean, Susana? Why are you always creeping about me and frightening me?"

"There is no cause for fear. I bring only good to all the house. Hear me. Is the daughter of two races brave? Can she do that which she should do? Or must she serve a time before?"

"I declare, I feel as if I had stepped into another world. Why do the people down here talk so oddly? I hate mysteries. I wish you'd speak straight out what you have to say. I'm no braver and no more timid than other girls, I suppose. What do you mean?"

"Come into the garden. In the arbor of passion-flowers. I will tell my tale."

The arbor of passion-flowers. That was the roofed, open-sided sort of building in one corner of the great court, the place where earlier in the day her grandmother had also appointed a

meeting. She had missed that, since she was away with Alarico at the race, but she'd go to it now, with this silly old creature who seemed half-demented.

"I'm like a heroine in a cheap sort of story-book. Wouldn't the girls and boys at home laugh if they could see me, practical Edith, going after nightfall to keep a rendezvous with a crazy 'wise woman,' over a century old, and expecting to hear a sort of Arabian Nights fable? I have to pinch myself to know that I am I, and can hardly believe it was such a few days ago that I went skating in Sissmissit. But all right! I must stop thinking about home, and nobody here seems to need me. Let's see what La Profetisa has to offer."

The old woman had gone from the window and Edith saw her crossing the court through the moonlight, which was so clear and strong that the shadows cast by the trees and vines seemed almost black by contrast. With a little nervousness she followed the bent, blanketed figure to the sheltered arbor; but for some time after they had seated themselves within it, neither spoke. Finally, growing impatient, the girl demanded:

"Please, tell me now. I hate waiting."

"I have been waiting many years. Through many generations. Not one would listen. Now you have been sent."

"And I am ready."

"You rode across the mesa, this day, no? You saw the great rancho where are many men and many tasks, is it not?"

"Yes, I went. It was a fine sight, but I'm sorry about Alarico. If I had known as much as I do now I wouldn't have gone."

"What is to be, will be, yes. What the bit of gold he held? A trifle. A mite. Nought, nought. So I say, I, Susana, who knows."

"Humph. Three hundred dollars in clear cash is a fortune, as his mother said. Do you suppose she would consider it a trifle? Now that this terrible trouble has come to her, if you are really a friend of the house, as you claim, you should influence Alarico to help his mother."

"She? What is she? That was a mistake Alarico Garcelon made. But she serves. She, also, was sent. Basta. It is not of her I have breath to talk. It is of the past and the future. I have a tale for the ears of the daughter of the

daughter who was born far from the home of her own people."

"No, indeed. At the home of my own people, please. I'm a good deal more Hale than Garcelon, I guess."

"Tst! Time passes. We are wasting it. Listen. As the rancho of San Pedro is good Santa Rosa was ten thousand times better. Surely, of their own had the Garcelons more than hundreds; the vacquerous, the tanners, the blacksmiths, the weavers, the women—ah! so many, so many. In the great kitchen—that is gone—were always meats roasting, loaves baking, night and day, food preparing. For one must eat, yes? and where is one now were the hundreds then."

"It is all very interesting, and I shall like to hear about it some other time. Just now I'm impatient to know what you think I can do to repair the family fortunes. It seems to me rather as if I had come to make them worse. As you say, one must eat; and so far there hasn't been a very bountiful table set at Santa Rosa. I almost feel as if it were wrong for me to use the portion I have to take."

But instead of replying the aged woman fell

into a reverie and from that into a doze ; which for a time Edith hesitated to disturb, till finding that even she grew cold with the chill that was in this night air, she gently touched the shriveled hand and roused Susana.

“Eh ? What ? Where am I ? But yes ? I remember. About the grand old days and the sheep-shearings, was it ?”

“No, indeed. But just what I can do to restore these altered fortunes of my family, as you profess to think I can. Tell me that and then we should both go in. I suppose one can take cold sitting out at night even in this wonderful California.”

“Not those who are born here. Nor you, after a little. Wait. I am quite awake. Behold. There is a mountain yon. See ? It rises out of the mesa as if it had been piled there, by itself, alone. But no. Behind are others, the great range. Between them is a valley, most wonderful. Few go into it for the road is rough and the valley bare. But it is the way by which you must pass if you would find this wealth of which I tell.”

“Oh ! I shall be delighted, I'm sure !” cried Edith, laughing, in spite of the gravity of her

companion. It seemed so absurd that she should be actually hearing such rubbish from anybody's lips and seriously expected to believe it.

Susana waited till the girl had become attentive again and then resumed:

"It was a man of the race, another branch, himself gave me the key. I have talked and talked but none would hear. If the little Señorita from the north will not listen, then the key may be thrown into the great well and the Garcelons die of hunger. For to none other upon the broad earth was the message sent. He was of their kin, I say, this man, and he kept his secret to the last. When he was about to die he gave it to me, his friend. Yes. Behold."

The old woman drew from the folds of her blanket a small parcel, tightly wrapped and tied with horsehairs. This she held out through the broken lattice of the arbor so that the rays of moonlight fell full upon it. A very dirty-looking little parcel, Edith thought it; also that the affair was growing decidedly thrilling. She was quite as interested now as Susana desired, and moving nearer to the "seeress" asked:

"Is that what you call a 'key'?"

Without speaking further, La Profetisa untied the curious fastening and unrolled the bundle. The outer wrapping was of dingy satin which might once have done duty as a gala dress for some departed Garcelon; for even yet it showed traces of having been richly brocaded and to be of a quality to suit those past glories about which Susana prated.

Within the satin was a piece of tanned leather, dark with age, but even yet very soft and pliable. Its outer surface was plain, but on the reverse side was drawn a sort of map, in colors that were not yet faded, though, as Susana had told, the hand which traced it had long since turned to dust.

“Oh! isn't it queer? Is it really a—a key, a guide, to some place where treasure may be found?”

“In truth. Will the Señorita seek it for her people who need?”

“Yes, indeed. If it is possible. But you will have to tell me more and show me the way. I know so little about all this country.”

“The way is plain. It needs the faith of a child and the courage of a man. To-morrow, if the Dona Rosalia keeps not the closed house

of mourning, we will begin. The time passes. The old must die. It is now that I am here, and this night I sleep in peace. The burden I have carried is upon your shoulders, yes. Rest, heart's dearest. To-morrow, mañana. Good night."

With a rapidity of movement that was astonishing the venerable woman rose, folded her blanket closer about her and, as one indeed relieved of a burden long carried, crossed the court in another direction from that by which she had entered it and disappeared among the shadows.

Edith, too, rose, but slowly. She felt as if she were dreaming and that the light package in her hand was a weighty thing. She had never been a dreamer, but she would not have been a real girl if she hadn't now begun to speculate a trifle eagerly concerning this surprising matter.

"Of course it's all sheer nonsense. But yet—just suppose it were true! What if this is a really, truly map to some hidden mine? I suppose there is gold in all the California mountains, even these down in the south. But it's odd nobody has found it before this. How-

ever, it will be a fine adventure and I'll go where Susana leads the way and see what comes of it."

Edith had now quite forgotten her loneliness and homesickness and went to bed feeling almost guiltily cheerful, when she reflected that this was, in truth, a house of mourning. However, she had never known her uncle Alarico, and while she sympathized with those who had she was too honest to pretend a personal grief.

She scarcely noticed now, among the thronging fancies old Susana's words had roused, that her bed was hard and her conveniences few. All that was to be changed, as by a miracle!

"If I find it, the first thing will be to give my beautiful grandmother all the luxuries she would enjoy. The next, to do something for my neglected little cousins. After that——"

She did not lie awake to plan further, and it never entered her thought that even if she did discover this hidden mine there would be any difficulty in the working of it. She slept dreamlessly and awoke to another perfect day and with the feeling that she could accomplish anything whatever that she undertook.

But she did seek her aunt Ysidra in the kitchen and beg to be allowed some share in

the household tasks. She was again repulsed, though not unkindly, for her persistent effort to make friends was beginning somewhat to impress the toiling woman.

“But tasks, no? I know not to what the *Señorita* refers. Am not I the cook since ever was? What beside the cooking remains, save the few dishes that are *Marta’s* part! Ah! she is a wise child-body, is my *niña*, yes.”

Then she waited upon her grandmother; but even here found herself of no use. The *Dona Rosalia* was keeping fast and would not be disturbed. Let *Edith*, her beloved, her *Jesuita’s* daughter, make herself happy. Not for her the grief that was prostrating others. There were *Alarico* and the little ones. They should amuse, though quietly, as became a house of mourning. Let all await the arrival of *Dolores*, who had wisdom to direct and counsel. Some later time things would resume their natural order and then what so delightful, heart’s dearest, as the little *Edith* beside one? Hearing the family history and learning the things that became a gentlewoman of old California. But for to-day there was only retreat for the mother of a dead son.

There seemed nothing left to the active New England girl but to sit down obediently, in the idleness which was so irksome to her and so natural to her new friends. The ordinary avocations of an eastern housewife were unknown here. Very little sweeping or dusting was done, and this in only the most primitive way, by Ysidra, who still resented what she considered interference, whenever Edith attempted to help her. Yet she was no longer harsh of manner toward her guest and was even pleased that the children should have taken so great a fancy to her. It seemed rather as if in ceaseless labor she herself found some respite from anxious thought; for already it was less grief for her husband that filled her heart than foreboding concerning the future of her household.

As Edith had said "people must eat;" but where was food to come from now?

When the little ones had tired of her reading and even of the quiet games, which she felt were the only ones appropriate just then, Edith sought old Susana, whom nobody had seen that morning.

"Where can she be, Marta? She is so old she wouldn't be able to walk far, would she?"

and Alarico has taken Terror, so she could not ride—even if the little beast would let her. Does your brother often stay away over night like this ? ”

Marta glanced toward the distant room, where her mother sat rudely patching a ragged frock of baby Juan's, and nodded silently. Her young face became very grave and Edith was almost sorry she had asked. Yet, if she were to live here, was it not right that she should understand the family affairs ?

“ Come, dear. Let's find La Profetisa. She told me a wonderful tale last night. I want to hear further about it.”

“ She tells it to herself many times. You are the daughter of the daughter, is it not ? You are to make us all rich. So she says, and one must believe a person so old, no ? When she is awake she says that, but she is nearly always sleeping. We shall find her asleep this moment, somewhere, yes.”

Marta's supposition was right. Susana lay curled upon a heap of blankets in a large room of the old mansion, which was almost destitute of furniture.

“ Oh ! she ought not to be left like this.

Can't we make her more comfortable, Marta? If my aunt Ysidra would only let me try, I think I could do many things that would add to the cosiness of this old adobe. It is so big and bare; but if all the things which are fit to use were brought into a few of the rooms, everybody could enjoy them and it would be so much pleasanter."

Marta looked up surprised.

"Are they not as they have always been? In truth. Why disturb them? As for Susana, yes. There is a nice warm place, a little chamber beyond the kitchen, where she can stay if she likes. She does when it rains and is cold. But this she chooses, and my mother says she is to have her own way. One would not like to cross the will of so old and wise a person, no?"

"If it were for her own good I'd not hesitate to cross it. Old she is, but surely not so wise, or she wouldn't prefer such a hole as this to a decent bedroom."

"She is not like us, you know, little Edith. She is an Indian. She was a sort of—of servant, is it not? to our ancestors, in the days when she was young. That was long, long ago,

yes. So long—I cannot even think about it. But she is a blessing. Our aunt Dolores says she must be left to do exactly as she likes, and she likes—this.”

“I’m going to speak to her. Has she had any breakfast?”

“One does not eat when one is asleep!” laughed the little girl, her serious face brightening for the moment at her cousin’s suggestion.

“Susana! O Susana!” called Edith, putting her lips very near the aged woman’s ears.

La Profetisa started slightly, and when the call was repeated sat up and looked about her with a confused expression. Finally she said, as if to herself:

“It is the voice for which I have waited. The time has come.”

“I should say it had! Come, dear old Susana, don’t stay here in this untidy place. There’s a better one, little Marta says. Let me help you to it and give you some breakfast. Have you been here ever since you talked to me in the arbor, last night?”

Susana uncovered her head and for the first time Edith had a good view of the withered face. It looked as if it had dried, like an apple

left over winter on a Sissmissit tree, and the girl smiled at the remembrance. Then she slipped her arm under that of the centenarian and helped her to her feet. As she did so, Susana shivered and looked through the window toward the sky.

"The rain is here," she observed.

"The rain? I don't see it. And, don't you remember? You were to show me the way to the mine, or whatever else it is, by which we poor folks are to grow rich again."

"The rain is here. When the sun shines and the mesa is green we will go. My coffee, child."

Two hours later the rain began. It had been much delayed, that year, the people said, but it now came with a suddenness and thoroughness that made up for lost time; and as a beginning of the dreariest portion of Edith Hale's life.

Alarico did not return. It was the longest absence he had ever made and Ysidra was visibly anxious, her face growing thin and deeply lined, though she made no complaint and to Marta's wonderings concerning her brother replied briefly:

"When the rain is over we shall hear. Who could come to Santa Rosa now?"

Who, indeed ! It was now, for the first time, that the New Englander learned what a simple, "rain " may be. The water fell in sheets, as it were, and incessantly. One day was so like another that she almost lost count of them. The great rooms were drearily cold and dismal, Edith's own bedroom that she had found so enchanting when she first beheld it now seeming like a vault.

Dona Rosalia kept her own apartment closely ; and here, for a short time each day, her grandchildren were permitted to gather about the extremely small fire on the very wide hearthstone by which some mitigation of the prevailing chilliness was attempted. The Señora was very susceptible to the changes of weather, in this climate where changes were few, and suffered greatly now. She spent as much of her day as she thought decent in her bed : and when out of it sat close to the scanty blaze that Ysidra faithfully kept, wrapped in a great cloak of shabby velvet in which she looked even more white and fragile than ever.

" But why, dear Grandmother, doesn't aunt Ysidra make the fire larger ? At home we should call that sort of fuel merely kindling-

wood. We would never think of its being big enough to warm a room, even a little one. If she would let me I would be glad to fetch more wood and tend the fire myself. I am afraid you will be ill of this creeping cold."

The Señora laid her delicate hand upon Edith's sunny head and stroked it tenderly.

"You are very sweet to me, heart's dearest, but fret not. Nothing comes by chance. The discomfort that the Lord sends, shall I not bear it patiently? And what matters? It is all in the lifetime, yes; and my life is near its close, I think. Why murmur?"

"Now, grandmother! I can't let you talk like that? Don't you remember what old Susana says? I have come to make you rich! Well, when I do, we'll have such a fire on these old hearths as will warm you through and through and make you young again. You mustn't talk about dying, beautiful grandmother! I never allow my grandfather Hale to do that, and I quite intend—when I grow rich—that he and you shall meet! Ah! yes, I do. He's the very loveliest old gentleman in all the world, as you are the very loveliest lady. I can't call you old; for until this storm came

and—and your fresh sorrow—you seemed almost like a girl. Oh! I wish it would stop raining!”

“Wish not so, charming child. The rain is the gift of Providence. When it rains this thirsty country has a sufficient drink for once, and it is the only time in all the year. Think of my garden when it is over. And vex not good Ysidra, little one. She does what she may—and let none complain. Now, I am tired. I will lie down again; you shall cover me warmly, is it not? Then take the children out. They are young. There are many rooms still left in the old adobe where they may exercise in their play and so make themselves warmer than a fire would do.”

So Edith helped her grandmother back to rest and shut her in alone with her scanty fire and such comfort as was possible. For herself, she repaired to her own cold room and wrote journal-letters “to everybody at Sissmissit,” though there was no possible chance of posting them until some indefinite future time. These letters gave a far more graphic picture of her new life than the writer herself suspected; and when they did finally reach their destination aroused

a deal of indignant comment among the girl's warm friends.

"Edith Hale low-spirited ! The thing seems incredible," said Derby Saunders to Mary Foster. "Here I've been envying her her good times and coaxing my folks to take a trip down there themselves. But there's an awful homesickness in the way your letter ends, Molly : "If I could only see one dear familiar face ! If I could only see—why even Buff !" Father says he doesn't doubt the dear old Dominie acted for the best, but he'd ought to have found out all about things first. Fifteen years make a big change anywhere, and it was fifteen years since Edith's father made that will, or whatever it was."

Meanwhile, Edith was writing and watching the skies, or the rain-soaked mesa round about the old adobe ; and so three miserable weeks passed ; and on the twenty-first night of the rain the girl crept into bed feeling as if she wished she might not wake up again for ages.

But daylight brought the miracle of sunshine. It streamed straight through the window over her face and flooded all the place with glory. It warmed the mesa and already the faint green

which had been perceptible through the brown grasses sprang up full and strong.

Edith dressed in haste and ran singing to the door of the room, occupied by her grandmother who responded with loving cheerfulness. The children were wildly gay and on every face, save one, was the reflection of the sun's own joyfulness.

But Ysidra was still somber and the rheumatism which had tormented her during the storm had not yet left her. Her face was drawn with pain as well as foreboding when, as soon as the monotonous breakfast of porridge was over, she called her niece aside and asked her first favor.

"It is a good walker that you are, no?"

"Yes, indeed. I'm a regular tramper. Can I walk anywhere for you?"

"Come," said the woman, leading the way into a pantry, built to hold great stores of provisions, but now empty. Lifting the lid of a meal barrel she pointed silently to a small quantity of the flour remaining.

"You mean that that is all we have left to eat?"

Ysidra nodded.

“And you wish me to go for more? Where?”

“There is the city, yes.”

“But that is fifteen miles away. Oh! don’t look so disappointed. I can do it, easily. Yet is there no nearer place?”

“I would go, I, myself, only the lameness is so bad. And when I go who remains? The nearer place, it is a small town, in truth. Though——”

In the flash of despairing entreaty Edith read the mother’s heart. Food was necessary, absolutely, but news of Alarico—that was even more so. All these weeks she had been so patient and uncomplaining, her natural harshness having almost disappeared, yet now when a chance offered to bring her news of her son, her idol, she was distracted with grief.

“You poor, devoted dear! I’ll go. I’ll go at once. And I’ll bring you word back just as soon as I can. I’ll bring him, too, if that is possible. Oh! I am so glad to be useful to somebody at last!”

She threw her arms impulsively around her aunt’s neck, who received the caress without response, save for a wonderful brightening of

the worn face. But that was all the answer Edith needed; and now, once more her shiny self, she set out promptly on her long walk, little dreaming of any hidden perils by the way.

CHAPTER XVI

A LIVELY PIECE OF GOOD NEWS

“WHAT a wonderful world it is! And how odd that I should be going alone on such a tramp, away down here at the end of creation—or the United States—to hunt up a missing boy, so wild he breaks his mother’s heart; and an aunt so good she breaks her mother’s the other way. Of course, I don’t mean that; but it does seem to me as if my beautiful grandmother needed the only daughter she has left to look after herself instead of teaching a lot of Indian children and nursing another lot of folks that have no claim upon her. However, I’d better stop passing judgment till I know both sides. That was dear grandfather’s rule and it worked pretty well. I can’t help wishing, though, that he’d known the other side of this California business before he sent me down here. I feel as if I were only one more in the way; one more to be fed and housed, and so

useless. That is, I have been useless till now. Maybe things will change after this, just as the world is changing in this sunshine. Why, I really believe I can see the things grow. There are actually some pink flowers opening while I look at them. I'll go gather a bunch. No, I won't either. They'd wither and maybe suffer, and they look so happy growing. Besides, I mustn't turn aside. Fifteen miles is fifteen miles—many steps that! But I remember the way Mr. Mason drove; and he pointed out a short-cut toward the last part that he said a foot-passenger could take and lessen the distance by about three miles. Three miles—I'll try that way. The hunters use it, he said; and there must be a beaten path, of course. I hoped I would find somebody going city ward who would give me a lift, as teamsters do at home, but I've seen nobody thus far. This weather should soon set the 'towrists' restless and give Mr. Mason plenty to do. I hope it will. I feel as if he were my own folks and the truest kind of friend. Now, I'll rest a bit."

It might have been two hours after she had left the old adobe when she reached the point where the short-cut diverged from the main road,

and after resting for a time she struck boldly along the unknown way.

But if this by-path lessened the distance it added to the difficulties; for the water had washed it badly, and in many places still stood in pools that blockaded her progress.

“This makes me think of another of grandfather’s sayings: ‘The direct course is always the safest one.’ He meant that about actions—mental ones—but it seems to apply to physical ones, too. I’d turn back, only I hate turning back in anything. Oh! what a sight that is yonder!”

For want of other company, Edith had made companion of her thoughts and now stood marveling beside a deep gorge wherein the rains had wrought much havoc; tearing up great boulders and heaping them together, uprooting bushes, and even trees, and leaving still in the bottom of the cañon a foaming, rushing stream. Beyond the gulch the valley stretched long and beautiful; the arroyo—but yesterday a river of sand—gleaming in the sunlight, dazzlingly bright. Across the cañon, above the muddy stream which raged along its bottom, was a narrow foot-bridge, each end of it fastened half-

way up the sloping sides. The bridge was but two planks' width, railed on one side; a dizzy passage for any one not most sure-footed; and that even those familiar with it would scarcely have attempted just then.

"Why! To get to that bridge I shall have actually to slide on this side. Yet how can I go away back to the main road again? Or how shall I get up when I reach the other side? Hmm."

For a brief time the girl stood and considered; then set out to try the slope. She knew little fear and was growing eager to reach the town. Once there, across the bridge, the way would be short, for the city lay invitingly near and the bay beyond seemed so close she felt she could almost put her hand out and touch it.

"I can hear Alarico saying: 'That's the atmosphere.' Alarico! It is for news of him I've come and I'll not waste a single rod that I've already crossed. Here goes!"

Selecting the cleanest spot along the bank which she could the girl clutched at the few grasses and shrubs left growing in it and slid cautiously down to the ledge whereon the end of the bridge rested. The descent did not im-

prove the appearance of her clothing, but that was a minor matter, and having straightened herself again she struck out over the bridge.

How it swayed ! What could be the matter with it ? Or was it just her own imagination and the sight of the torrent below that had made her giddy ?

“Edith Hale ! Don’t be a ninny ! Of course it’s strong or there would be a sign posted somewhere to warn of danger. It’s well worn, too. Lots of people have crossed here and I’ll stop looking down and fix my eyes on that further shore and—behave myself !”

She did lift her gaze, more terrified than she would admit even to herself, and—what was that ? A man at the top of the cañon wall beyond, waving his arms and wildly gesticulating. She stopped short. What did he mean ? He was addressing her, that was evident. Was she to go forward or backward ?

The bridge was certainly swaying and now fearfully. One glance down showed the branch-laden torrent tearing between the frail supports of the structure as if intent on carrying them with it.

She raised her eyes again and there was the



"THE BRIDGE IS GOING"

man waving even more wildly, and suddenly throwing up his hand with a gesture of despair. Then he slid downward, as she had done upon the other extreme of the span, and braced himself with his back against the mud as he made a trumpet of his hands and yelled:

“Run! Run! The bridge is going!”

It was well for Edith Hale that she had been the swiftest, lightest runner at their old school games at Sissmissit. She realized her full peril now, and with one hurried prayer for help darted forward. Afterward it seemed to her that her very body had been lightened by the eagerness of her spirit, for a bird could have touched those breaking timbers with scarce more delicacy than did the girl's sturdy feet.

It was but the fraction of a moment, yet it seemed an eternity of time ere she reached the further bank, from which the fastenings had already torn loose. There was a chasm to be leaped—a feat that only desperation could accomplish; and with eyes tight shut, breath suspended, she made that outward spring toward life—or death.

“Well, well! My stars and stripes! Thank the Lord he sent me here this minute!”

When this ejaculation reached her real consciousness Edith was sitting on the ground, at the top of the cañon wall, with Eleazer Mason beside her. He was splashed with reddish, slimy mud from head to foot, his honest face not excepted, and she felt, rather than saw, that she was in the same condition.

Then she saw him pointing silently down stream, and there, swirling along in the flood, crashing and breaking, with sharp sounds as of guns firing, the old footbridge was going swiftly to pieces. A shudder ran through her and she instinctively clasped Eleazer's outstretched hand.

"How—awful!"

"Yes. And how wonderful! Needn't tell me there's no such thing as Providence. Else how happened I should be just here when you needed me so much? 'Cause, even if you had made that leap and I hadn't been on hand to catch and hold you, you'd have slid clean down to the bottom and—but my stars! Let's not talk about it. You're as pale as a ghost and we're both sights for the fair! Mud, mud, mud—nothing but mud! Easy enough to clean that off and, lucky 'tis, there's water plenty in

Californy, for once, to do it with. Now—talk. The whole business; how you've come here and why."

But she could not find speech so easy, for a little time. She could only look up at the blue sky and around on the sparkling world and marvel at the peril she had endured and escaped. Yet after awhile she began to recover and said, very quietly:

"It doesn't seem as if this could be just the same morning, does it? But—well, how I came? Was along that dangerous by-way you pointed out to me that day you were taking me to San Rosa. Why? Because there was nobody else to come and somebody had to."

"Hain't nobody been to the old ranch since the rain begun?"

"Not a person. Aunt Ysidra is out of food for us all and she is terribly anxious about Alarico. Do you know where he is?"

"You don't mean to say that there good-for-nothing greaser I paid to go out to you didn't go? Why, I've been restin' as comfortable as a jack-rabbit in an a'falfa field. Sho? I wouldn't have had this happen for anything. But I've been havin' troubles of my own. The water

beat anything I ever see, this year, and there was a landslide back of my little house and I've been fightin' disaster every day. Then I've a touch of the lumbago, now and again, and when I wasn't fightin' water I've been fightin' pain. Well, I've got good news and bad, both, for you and your new folks. But it won't do to set here in the wet and discuss it. My team's hitched down below, city side this bluff, and I just clumb up to take a look at that bridge. Lots of the towerists are going hunting, now the rain's over, and I promised to just step this way and report whether they'd safe cross or not. I guess most of 'em will prefer to take the long road, eh?"

He laughed, as much to cheer this sober-looking girl who had not yet gotten over her shock as at his own wit; then suddenly demanded:

"Why don't you ask what my good news is?"

"I'm waiting for you to tell me; because I see you can't keep it to yourself long."

"Huh! I can't, can't I? Now you've put me on my mettle. But that boy, 'Larico! He's got his come-uppance for once."

“What has happened to him? Where is he?”

“In the hospital, getting a broken leg healed. His Aunt Dolores is tending him. So you’ll kill two birds with one stone when I take you there, as I shall right away. You’ll see ’em both to once. It’s as good a place as another to clean the mud off and it’ll do the chap good. More good ’an he deserves, by a long shot.”

“How did he break his leg? when? where?”

“Come, you dear little Yankee! You can ask just as many questions as——”

“You can!”

“Just so! just so!” laughed Mr. Mason. “Well, first, how; by getting into bad company, or staying in it; for that young scalliwag knows all the disreputable loafers in San Diego. That ain’t sayin’ so much, either; for this is such a law-abiding community it don’t take more’n a half dozen constables to police the whole city. True. Why, our city prison’s nothing more’n a sort of barn, cheapest sort at that. But, ‘birds of a feather’ you know. Alarico’s as vain as he is smart. I do allow he’s that.”

“Which? Smart or vain?”

“Both. He’s fell into the clutches of idle men, a good deal older than himself and learnt

all their badness. Leastways, so far forth as he can understand it, bein' by nature a clean-hearted fellow, after all."

"Poor Larry! You're giving him a pretty damaging record, seems to me."

"Well, he deserves it, just as I said. But facts. He come down here that night after the races and after he heard the news about his father's death. He was terribly used up by that, for he loved his father more'n anybody in the world, so I've often heard. And having that money upset the other side of his nature. He was in the lowest depths and on the highest heights, so to speak, both to one time. Consequence was, soon as them loafers spied him they set out to have some fun. They got him to give them a grand supper, and to buy a lot of stuff he didn't want; and finally to ride another horse they wanted to sell him. I don't know the rights of the rest. He got throwed some way and his leg broke, bad. That scared the others an' they hustled him off to hospital, lightning quick. Miss Dolores was nursing there and she's got him in charge. That's where she saw her duty lay, even if she'd been let to go to her mother, which I doubt. She's

a good woman, Dolores is, and I'm glad you're goin' to know her. She can give you lots of good advice and what to do at San Rosa, even if she can't live there with you. She does her duty as she sees it and nobody can do better nor that. Nobody could do more good, any way. She's loved from one end the city to the other an' far beyond its limits. Many's the poor creature has died happier for havin' knowed Dolores Garcelon, let alone all that's livin' who near about worship her. There! Have I said enough for a spell? or shall my old tongue keep a-clacking on?"

By this time they were in the carriage, well along toward the heart of the city and to the beautifully situated hospital where lay poor Alarico, repenting his foolishness at his leisure. Edith had quite recovered her spirits and now related to her friend all that had passed at Santa Rosa during the storm, and what old Susana had said on that last night preceding it.

"What do you suppose she means, Mr. Mason? Is she worth listening to? Could it be possible that there is really a mine of gold anywhere which belongs to the family? I'm just eager to go with her and see."

“My dear little Yankee, I’ve been hearing that story ever since I struck this town. It might be true and then again it mightn’t. You can’t tell. These old-timers are as full of cran-ky notions as—I be!”

“Oh! that’s no advice. You talk just as Eli would. He’s always afraid to commit himself or give a straight opinion on any subject—unless he loses his temper. Then he’ll tell you fast enough what he thinks. Of course, I don’t mean that you’re alike in the temper part, because I don’t yet know anything about yours; but you’re alike in wobbling all around a subject and not going right toward it. Please forgive my disrespect. I’m so used to scolding dear old Eli; and this morning, meeting you after these weeks of homesickness, and your saving me—I forget we’re really strangers; and I am greatly troubled. I am, indeed. Oh! is that the post-office, yonder? I have a lot of letters to mail. They’re to my old schoolmates, and I reckon they’ll find them dreary reading. But I had to let out to somebody and I’ve begged them not to tell my home folks—that is any of the dismal part. Shall I get out and put them in the box?”

“Just give ’em to me. I’ll see if there’s any mail for Santa Rosa while I’m here. Then we can take it back with us.”

“We? are you going that way to-day?”

“Course. Don’t suppose I’d let Eli’s little girl walk that distance twice over, do you? Besides—but that’s tellin’! Now, the hospital. Then the Florence, to see Madam Eastman. Then—my cottage and, good news! Hi! won’t your big black eyes look bigger’n ever, when you see what—you will see?”

But Edith was already deeply engrossed by the pile of home letters which he had found for her at the post-office. Letters from her grandfather, her aunt, and from several schoolmates; including a round robin from her own class. The reading of these made her both happy and sad, but it was a hasty one; for before she had really finished—though Eleazer had kept silence till then—he interrupted her with the remark:

“Here we be! St. Luke’s hospital. A place that’s always doin’ good to somebody.”

Edith was a little timid as she followed Mr. Mason up the stone steps to the great door beneath its sheltering gallery, for it was her first visit to any such institution. Yet she had short

time for anxiety, since the door opened almost immediately and quite noiselessly in response to her guide's touch upon the electric bell.

There had been the heat of summer without and the lofty hall, with its cool tiled floor, whereon were spread soft rugs that deadened every footfall, seemed delightful by contrast.

"How still it is! How restful!"

The few physicians on duty, in their white coats, moved quietly about as calm and unruffled as if they were not every day, and nearly every hour, dealing with cases of life and death; while the sweet-faced nurses, in their white caps and simple gowns, passed to and fro upon their various tasks, so lightly that only sight betrayed their presence.

Eleazer and Edith stood for a moment waiting just inside the door, and as nobody spoke to them and the porter had already departed for the tiny apartment where he remained to attend the door, Mr. Mason accosted one of the nurses who was bearing a tray of food through an adjoining corridor.

"Good morning, nurse. Can we see either Dolores or Alarico Garcelon?"

"Good morning. Yes, I think so. They are

on the second floor. Left wing. Private room. Number Twelve."

Even the hackman's great boots seemed to have caught the knack of silence, and feeling very much as if they were in church the visitors ascended the broad central staircase and turned to the left. Another nurse silently indicated the room they sought, which was one of many opening from a long hall, at the end of which was a regular ward. Edith could see the rows of snowy beds in this great ward and that several of them were occupied. Yet she had no time to wonder about these afflicted people, for there was Eleazer standing before the open door of Number Twelve and regarding the youth who lay upon the cot therein with an odd expression of sympathy and satisfaction.

"Well, young man! So here's where you've brought yourself, is it?"

"Ha! The Señor Mason, no? Good morning. But—yes! It is, it is! My cousin Edith! You've come at last!"

Edith sped across the narrow space between the door and the couch and caught Alarico's thin hands in hers. She had never seen so

great a change in anybody, and she thought, at first, that he seemed dreadfully ill. But a second glance showed her that his eye was bright and clear and that he was rather paler than thinner. He had always been slight, but the rich coloring of his skin was quite gone now.

“‘At last!’ Alarico! The very first moment that I could after hearing you were hurt. Indeed, it was to learn what had become of you that I really came at all. To quiet your poor mother’s heart. She is grieving herself ill.”

The lad’s lashes drooped upon his cheek into which crept a faint flush of shame.

“But word was sent her, no? So I was told, and I—I had—I had not done well by my poor mother, I. I feared she might not so readily forgive and I was to be the head of the family, in reality, now. The three hundred dollars—that is gone, Beloved.”

Edith tried to return his pleading glance with a very stern one; yet he looked so young and innocent as he lay upon his pillow, and he had received so poor a training that she pitied rather than blamed.

“Oh! I suppose everybody makes mistakes; and that money came so easily I suppose you

didn't value it. It isn't for me to criticise and——"

She ceased speaking as a gentle-looking nurse moved swiftly from the hall straight to herself and clasping the girl's two hands in her own slender ones, said in the most musical voice Edith had ever heard:

"But there is no need to ask who this is, no! It is Jesuita's face and those are Jesuita's eyes which I see, yes. My beloved child, how glad I am!" and the stranger folded the young girl close and kissed her tenderly upon either cheek.

Edith thought she had never seen so sweet a creature, and she was not surprised that Alarico's gaze should also be fixed upon his aunt with an adoring reverence. Nor that, presently, he should remark, in a very humble tone:

"It was the best thing, yes, that I broke my leg. Far better than the money I earned in racing. All these weeks I have lain and my aunt has served me. But it is the truth I say, I, Alarico Garcelon, yes. Hear me. From this day on——"

Dolores lifted her white hand and the boy stopped speaking.

“Not by promises, which are vows, in God’s sight, but by deeds, niño. What one does, that is truth; what one says—pouf! a breath of wind. But there is always repentance and it is faith in my lad that I will keep, I myself; and a place in my prayers always. Now, it is to the little one from the north that I would listen. Ten minutes I can give. In that time I must learn all that may be told of my beloved mother, of poor Ysidra, of—whatever appertains to Santa Rosa; and of yourself, all.”

“I shall have to talk fast then, sha’n’t I?” demanded Edith, all fear of this stranger aunt lost in the warm love which had taken its place. Had her own mother, Jesuita, looked thus? If so she did not wonder that her New England father had carried her away to his home to let his own people see what a treasure he had found.

When the ten minutes had passed Nurse Dolores arose, and Edith understood that this was dismissal.

“In two weeks we hope Alarico may return to Santa Rosa. He will then remain there, doing his duty. If not so soon, then as early as may be. For my mother and Ysidra, for you

and the children, there are always my prayers and a meeting when God wills. On every Thursday from one to three in the day I have recreation. If it is right and best I will be glad to see my Jesuita's daughter then. Adios. God's blessing."

The visit had been a revelation to the strictly trained New Englander. According to all her previous ideas she should have seen nothing lovely in a life which was devoted to the service of strangers rather than to that of a family of relations which needed its help.

"I never knew there could be anybody so good who believed so falsely as to neglect one's own!"

"Tut, tut, child! Don't be a judger. The way it looks to me as that one-sized clothes can't fit everybody in the world; and so long as it is clothes it doesn't matter much what sort we wear. The thing is to be clothed, honestly and decently. That is, each man or woman ought to be religious, out of the heart, accordin' as religion appears to them to stand for all that's 'pure and of good report.' But, my stars and stripes. The idea of me turnin' parson, me! Say, child, I allow it's gettin' too late to tackle

Madam Eastman before dinner time. S'pose we ride right home to my house and take a snack there. Get the good news, too. It's such an amazin' lively piece of news I'd like to get shut of it, as the younkers say."

"What a riddle you are talking! Good news that is lively? Is it a person? A thing? A—what is it?"

At that moment they turned the corner of a street and came upon an excited crowd of half-grown lads, with a sprinkling of men among them, gathered in the middle of it. It was one of the unpaved side-streets in the new part of the town, and though the rain was so recently over it was already dusty from the beating and passing of many feet.

In the center of the group various noises indicated that some fight was in progress, and presumably between animals; for the crowd cheered vigorously:

"Go it, Billy!" "At him again, Brindle! The pup's clear grit!" "Hi Bill!"

Eleazer's suspicions had been promptly roused. Much to Edith's dismay he headed his team straight for the middle of the highway and, therefore, for the heart of the throng. Then

he stood up and peered forward, with an expression of mingled amusement and disgust.

“Get up, Edith! Stand up! There he is, your good news! The all firedest, tormentingest, pluckiest little varmint I ever had the care of! But I’m done. I hand him over. He’s yours from now on and I wish you joy of your prospects!”

Edith had quickly obeyed Eleazer’s command, and from her elevation in the carriage could easily see above the heads of the surging crowd; which swayed this way and that, to accommodate the movements of the combatants in its midst.

A goat and a dirty yellow dog were in mortal encounter, or apparently so. The goat was far the greater and stronger of the two, besides having a well-developed pair of horns for weapons; yet the dog was so agile and clever that he had already wearied his antagonist to the point of surrender; and just as Edith espied him he made a finish of the matter by seizing the goat’s beard with his teeth.

Instantly, the larger animal gave up the struggle, and hanging his head meekly seemed to beg for mercy.

“ Oh ! Mr. Mason ! That looks—like—Buff ! Could it be possible—Buff ! Buff ! Buff ! ”

Then did that yellow cur become transformed. He released his foe, cocked his head on one side, took a rapid survey of the assembled multitude, discovered the girl upright in the surrey and, with leaps which seemed incredible for such short legs, gained her side and landed with his paws upon her shoulders.

“ Buff—Buff ! you darling ! How came you here ! Oh ! Buff ! ”

He was frantic with delight and she utterly unmindful of the watching crowd. She hugged him close, clasping his homely body as if he were her dearest friend, while his incessant lappings of her beloved face effectually removed any traces of the mud-stains which might have been left upon it after her hospital visit.

“ Now friends, scatter ! ” ordered Eleazer. “ You’ve seen a pretty fight and a prettier sight ! That there little Yankee dog, he’s traveled over three thousand miles to meet his mistress, an’ I ’low it’s time to draw the curtain ! ”

CHAPTER XVII

THE CLOSE OF AN EVENTFUL DAY

ELEAZER drove swiftly away from the scene of the recent conflict and Edith asked no questions until he had stopped before the entrance to a pretty little garden with a vine-embowered cottage at the back.

“This is my shanty! Welcome to it, my dear!” cried the hackman, as he turned to help her from the carriage.

But she and Buff were already upon the ground, the dog running round and round her in an ecstasy of delight, barking excitedly, nibbling her shoe-buttons, leaping to lick her face, and altogether conducting himself so naturally that even a stranger could see that these two were old friends.

“Well, of all dogs ever raised, that’s the beat-enest! He’s chewed every rope in two I tied him with and broke every chain. I’ve put him under lock and key, and the first I’d know he’d get loose and run away and somebody’d

come fetchin' him back, sayin': 'Here's your express parcel, Mr. Mason. Charges collect on delivery;' or some such nonsense. I ain't a mite sorry to hand him over. Yet the way he'd set an' gaze into a fellow's face and whine and beg.—Pshaw! It almost brought tears to my eyes more'n once. He's had plenty to eat, but there were lots of days he'd hardly touch it. Just walk round and round the house and smell at the doors and cut up gen'ally."

"Express parcel! Is that the way he came?"

"Yes. You guessed right."

"How? who sent him?"

"Who would but Eli?"

"Eli! I should have thought him the last person to do that. Tell me all you know please, and quick. I can't wait to hear."

"Don't blame you, either. Well, that night after I'd left you at Santy Rosy I couldn't get you nor them old times what you'd raked up out of my mind. I'd asked you to write and tell the cantankerous chap how you'd met me and all. Remember?"

"Surely. And I did. The very first letter I wrote after I came; but, as you know, that letter has only just been posted."

“Well, I thought I wasn’t so plumb lazy but I might write myself. I did that night. And he no sooner got it than he wrote back and said, he’d sent you your dog by express and I was to give him to you just as soon as I could. The little beast had about pined to death after you and near broke all their hearts with his carryings on. Eli couldn’t stand it. Either the dog had got to go or he had. There wasn’t any livin’ up to the way minister’s folks should with all that torment going on. The creatur’ had about made Maria sick, too. She was sure some dreadful thing had happened to you and Eli wished he’d never been born, or else he’d left the old Dominie and come along with you. When a body’d raised up a little girl to be the apple of his eyes it was hard lines to have her snapped off by a lot of old Californians, and he’d sent the dog along as a sort of scout. He was much obliged to me for my invitation, and if Buff reached here all right he wouldn’t be so afraid to try the trip himself. The house was like a funeral ever since, and no more at present from your cousin to command, Eli Johnson.”

“Oh! how like him, how like him that sounds! The blessed, cross, good-hearted old

grumbler ! Did he pay the express charges himself, Mr. Mason ? ”

“ Yes. Every cent. Here’s the card of directions. I’ve kept it in my coat pocket and showed it to a power of folks. If that ain’t explicit an’ right to the pint, I don’t know ! ”

All the time the good man had been talking he had also been unharnessing and putting his horses in stable, and Edith had joyfully helped him. It did seem so delightful to her to be again in a clean, well-kept stable, where there was hay in plenty and everything had a comfortable look. It almost seemed as if Eleazer must himself be Eli, for their movements were very similar and each had the tidy way that the girl liked.

Then they went into the house and she begged to be allowed to scramble the eggs and make the toast which, with a great dish of fruit was to make their midday meal.

“ This is almost like New England ! ” she cried and bustled about, finding the dishes for herself, setting the table, and making a very picture of delight to the lonely old man who was her humble host. The tag which had been tied to Buff’s collar was written in Eli’s crooked hand

and characteristic of him, for it contained directions for every possible emergency that could arise and stipulated that the best of care should be given the four-footed traveler, as well as that any extra charges necessary should be forwarded to him.

“One thing more in the letter, Edith, was that he had done this thing on the sly. He wasn’t going to have any silly women talk and fuss and raise objections till it was too late. He guessed he was old enough and smart enough to send a yellow dog from one ocean to the other if he wanted to without gabbling about it. When the thing had started he’d tell and I was to write immediate and notify if the creatur’ got to this end all right. I did, right away; but—I don’t want any more dogs consigned to me ’less I can pass ’em on to their owners soon as received.”

“Oh! I’m sorry the blessed little fellow has given you so much trouble, you dear good friend. Yet, if you only knew how happy he makes me! Why, I always did talk to him as if he were human and tell him all my affairs, and he’ll hear a deal more now. He’ll be all of—of—Sissmis-sit I have, you see!”

“All of your ’own folks, you were goin’ to

say, I guess. But trouble—don't mention it. Don't ever use that word about anything I can do for you. My only trouble was lest I should lose him before that pesky storm let up so I could get him to you. I was in fear constant that though he'd come so far safe enough he'd make an end of himself now he'd arrived. But he kept me amused too; and what with him, and the water, and my lumbago I've had no time to worry about losin' trade, account of the rain. Now, if you've eat all you can, I'll just leave these dishes in the sink and we'll go to Madam Eastman. Untidy? No. Not a bit of it. A man that housekeeps for himself and runs a livery-hack at the same time has to suit his dish-washin' to his circumstances. Now and again I get a Chineese man in to help scrub. I tell you there ain't no dirt left on nothin' after he gets through. All ready? Wait! we must tie that dog or we'll lose him yet!"

"Tie my Buff? lose my Buff? you couldn't lose him now," answered Edith proudly.

"Maybe not. I s'pose I can risk it if you can."

"I'll risk it."

And she was right. All inclination for mischief or street fights had left the traveled ca-

nine's mind. He stalked sturdily along so close to Edith's side that he nearly tripped her up, but he glanced neither to the right nor left, and if he could have spoken would have said that the only wish in his heart was to keep forever near to that beloved mistress who had been restored to him.

Then they went to the great hotel upon the bluff, where Madam Eastman had passed so many winters and where, indeed, the guests were almost all of those who had made their comfortable quarters a sort of home. The second greeting was, also, a cordial one; and for the first time the country-bred girl saw the inside of a well-appointed hostelry.

Mrs. Eastman's private suite of rooms was furnished with a richness that astonished her young visitor, and indeed somewhat impressed her. But after a little she grew accustomed to the scene and her tongue ran nimbly over all that had occurred since the lady had left her at Santa Rosa, on the day news came of the sailor uncle's death.

"And now I have told you everything, dear Madam, and I want your advice. I don't believe that my people at home ever dreamed

things were just as they are here or they would not have sent me unless some different arrangements could be made. Grandfather so loves learning I'm sure he would regret my giving up all study, yet what am I to do? I even feel as if I ought not to eat, and yet—I can't take it upon myself to interfere and write home to Sissmissit. Not yet. Do you suppose there is nothing, nothing left? Only what my uncle earned? And about this story of Susana's. Do you suppose there could be any real truth in her claim? If so, I wish—oh! how I wish I could go and see. But I doubt if she is strong enough to walk as far as those mountains look, even if she remembers the way. I wouldn't dare ride that broncho, even if he were at home and——”

“And you're in a peck of trouble, eh? well, my dear, thank you for coming to me. I bade you do so if you needed help, and so did our good Eleazer. He is a practical man and worth his weight in—well, something fine, even if not gold. He had a fine surprise for you, did he? Did he not tell you anything more?”

“He told me much, but I don't know what you mean, especially.”

“About the burros?”

“No. I’ve seen some along the way, and in the city, but he said nothing.”

“Very well. Listen. I have bought two burros and you are to take them to Santa Rosa for me. I——”

“Oh! Madam Eastman! That is too much!”

The odd little lady made a funny grimace.

“Child, don’t leap to conclusions. I haven’t given them to you. If I had——”

Edith’s face was now crimsoning with shame, but she rallied:

“If I made that horrid mistake it was because you have been so—so very generous in every way that I expected nothing else. I mean—Oh! don’t you know what I mean? I’m getting so mixed up and I’ve seen so much and been through so much to-day, after the weeks of terrible quiet that——”

“That you are as transparent as that window-pane and just as innocent. Listen once more. I have bought a pair of burros; and I don’t know what to do with them. No, you needn’t look so wise. It wasn’t to help you out that I got them, but another girl-body who has been staying here

for several months. She came with her mother who has become enough better of a dangerous illness to return east; but the child grieved so over her pets that I bought them and promised to find them a decent home. 'Where they will be loved,' she stipulated. I don't know of any place where there is so much honest affection and good pasturage going to waste at the same time as at San Rosa. I think Ysidra Garcelon has sense enough to put my burros out to graze on her mesa, has she not? If I pay her a fair price for the same? and of course I should want them exercised. It would be a great pity to let two such nimble-footed creatures get stiff in their joints just because there weren't young Garcelons enough to go around and ride them?"

"Ah! who is transparent now?" asked Edith, catching her old friend's hand and kissing it impulsively.

"Besides," continued Madam, calmly, "I really think that where there is so much smoke there really must be some flame. I've been hearing that mine story so long I'm tired of it. I'd like to have it investigated, and I don't suppose we could reasonably ask old Susana to live

another century in order to give us time, do you ? ”

“ Oh ! you funny dear ! ”

“ Let’s have in Eleazer, the wise. I’ve a notion that has just come to me. I’ll try it upon his common sense and see what happens.”

She rang and Mr. Mason was shown in. He was far less impressed by the luxury which had surprised Edith than she had been, for he was often at this and other hostelries, on business intent. He stood until Madam Eastman suggested that he should sit, and without interrupting her—a rather surprising thing—listened gravely to all she had to say.

“ My idea is simply this. If you will go home with Edith, in such a wagon as would carry the provisions they need, and that Edith assures me she has money of her own to buy, in addition to the little sum her aunt was able to give her—by the way, child, I never before saw twenty-five dollars do the work that yours has ! ”

“ Oh ! it hasn’t wasted, you see, because you and Mr. Mason and all I know have been so kind and generous. Never mind ! Some day, after we find that gold mine of ours, I’ll be able

to pay everybody back and with a good interest, too. Of love as well as money. Oh! if I could find it!"

"Mr. Mason, I want you to take this scatter-brain home, with her belligerent dog, and her tenant burros, and all the food necessary for all. You'd best arrange to stay over night. They should be able to give you some sort of bed and breakfast in that great old adobe. Then to-morrow, La Profetisa being auspicious—and now the weather is sure to be so—you could all drive as near to the famous mine as possible. Then you could ride burro or horseback the rest of the way. It is just possible that you may strike a vein of richness which will reach even over into my fallow, or idle, property. If you do I shall be doing a good thing for myself; and if you don't I'll be satisfying my silly old romantic fancy. What say? Can you leave your family of nobody? And what about the Terror? He's still at your stable, isn't he?"

"He was, Ma'am, until to-day. But now, I was going to tell you, he's broke loose and cut stakes for the land knows where. Odd! My own team, there isn't a finer in Californy, will stand till the end of time if I don't take 'em

out myself ; but let me once try to act guardeen for a Garcelon dog or broncho and—my stars and stripes ! I've no more discipline than a five-year-old."

" Oh ! well. Don't worry over him. He's a mighty swift little animal and about as treacherous as he is swift, I fancy. He'll turn up all right when we least expect it. Now, if you'll make your plans and Edith's purchases, she and I will have another little talk ; then a bit of supper, for I want her to taste some of the dishes I find well prepared here ; and, afterward, good-by for a time. But the rain is over, child. The sun shines as it does nowhere else but in Southern California, and you're going to live in a wonder world of beauty for the next few weeks."

So it was settled. And toward evening Eleazer appeared with his wagon, his load of provisions, the docile burros tied behind, and—the Terror himself. The latter little beast had turned up, as the Madam had predicted at the Mason stable, just in time to add himself to the homeward bound party.

It cannot truthfully be said that Eleazer received the addition with pleasure. There was

a "young moon" to be sure, and the hackman knew his road well. But he had not traversed it since the rains, and there might be washouts where least expected. He thought they would have difficulty sufficient in piloting, or leading, the two burros; but Edith helped him out somewhat by suggesting:

"If the burros are so gentle, why not tie one behind the other, and the foremost to one side of the wagon. Then, if I have a strong enough rope I will lead the broncho myself from the opposite side. We should have a lantern, I suppose, for that's Eli's rule. Buff shall ride beside me; and we'll travel like a little circus on the move from one town to another. I often and often have led old Derry for Eli, to and from the blacksmith shop."

"My stars! It sounds well, and I hope it'll be as easy as you seem to think. Though I reckon there's some slight difference 'twixt pacin' along a country road, tuggin' at an old horse's halter, than ridin' in my wagon and pulling your arms out the socket, draggin' a broncho after you."

"Well, my good friend, have you anything better to suggest?" asked Madam, curtly. She

was not a person who liked to have her plans miscarry and she had planned this return very satisfactorily to herself. After the visit to the mine she intended to pay another one herself to San Rosa, if not to the distant mountains beyond. She had, indeed, quite caught the spirit of Edith's excitement over the matter.

"No. Not to say as I have. Not unless Edith here was to stop over night and go home in the morning. Daylight would be better for such a job than night time, I 'low."

"Oh! I wouldn't dare!" exclaimed the girl, greatly troubled. "I promised Aunt Ysidra I would surely come. She bade me hire somebody to bring me if I could not walk so far again, and she would think harm had befallen me. So, also, would my beautiful grandmother and—and—I—must go. Though——"

"Tut, tut, child. Say no more. I'm not scary for myself. I'm an old forty-niner and when a fellow has crossed the plains he ain't likely to get skittish over a fifteen-mile drive in a settled country. It's only this menagerie we're a-startin' with that's give me the notion. But, pshaw! We'll be all right, of course. So put on your hat, or your cap, Edith, and the

Madam had better lend you a shawl or something, I guess, 'cause the night'll be damp."

Five minutes later they were on the way. A crowd of guests watched them from the glass-parlor; where one old citizen remarked:

"Well, that's a ticklish piece of work Mason's laid out for himself. There isn't a better horseman in the county than he is, but—to drive a spirited team and lead three—at night—over a rain-washed road—I don't see whatever possessed him to do it."

"I do. The pleading eyes of a little girl he likes," said Madam Eastman quietly. Then she went away again to her own rooms, but her heart was strangely disturbed.

"What an old silly I was! I was as much for having them start as Edith herself, and now—I'd give a good bit of money if I had her safe beside me. If anybody has got to worry it might as well be her sullen aunt as poor me! Well, I always was a simpleton, but I'll turn over a new leaf. And I sha'n't sleep a wink to-night. I've made up my mind to that."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RETURN

ELEAZER'S handsome horses were in fine fettle and started away from the hotel at a swift pace, tossing their heads, switching their tails, and altogether conducting themselves as would any spirited span which had been standing idle for three weeks.

Edith was not afraid, and she had all she could think about in keeping the broncho in order; for the fiery little animal strongly objected to being led in such ignoble fashion. Mr. Mason took in the situation and remarked:

"Terror thinks that if there's any leading to be done he'd rather do it himself. But as soon as I can get the team down a little we'll go slower and he'll come under, too. The bays won't keep this up forever, but they're high-strung and need exercise. Hurt your hand, does it?"

"To hold the broncho? No. I've wound

my handkerchief around it, any way. I didn't want to soil my glove, for——"

"You don't know when you'll get a new pair, eh? That's right. You have been raised right. Though that's of course, since it was New Hampshire raisin.' I guess you'll be writing another letter to Sissmissit, by to-morrow, eh? Tellin' old Eli how his express parcel disgraced his ministerial up-bringing by gettin' into a common street-fight. With not even another dog, either, but just an ordinary billy-goat. I 'low he sets pretty close to you on that back seat. Ain't going' to let you out of sight again in a hurry, I guess."

"No, indeed. The dear little fellow must have behaved very badly, though, at home, else my thrifty Eli would never have paid a lot of money to get him sent across the country. Or else, maybe he thought I'd miss him so. Just think, in my letters home to-day, I said I wished I could see somebody from Sissmissit and I wished I had my Buff. Yet he was already arrived!"

"Yes. Things do work out queer, if one watches close to see. Now he's come he may be a lot of good to you. I can't say he would

be to me—after my short experience carin' for him. But Eli's a queer shaver. Or was one. I remember once some folks came visiting to our house and gave us boys each a dollar. A whole silver dollar. That was more money, 'an either of us had ever had in our lives, an' the the way we spent it showed the difference in us. We was took to Concord, an' I went to a circus, a bake-shop, a candy-store an' in less than an hour I hadn't a cent left. Eli went to the candy-store, too; but after lookin'—whoa, there! steady, boys, steady's the word!—after lookin' around, as I said, he picked out a candy peach and asked how much it was. One cent. So he bought it, after ponderin' the matter consid'able, and had it wrapped up. I asked him why he didn't eat it, an' I wish you could have seen his face! I can see it this minute, in my mind. The most horror-struck look on it ever was. Eat it? No, siree. He took that home as careful as careful, and the ninety-nine cents in another parcel. I remember he got the candy woman to give him the change all in coppers, 'cause it looked so much more. That's Eli when he was a little tacker, an I reckon it's Eli still. Wouldn't wonder if he had that candy

peach yet, laid away somewheres. If he has, though it may have turned yellow with age, it'll be just as clean and nice as it was when it come out the store."

"Why, Mr. Mason, he has! I've seen it, though I never heard its history. He showed it to me one house-cleaning time and said it represented the folly of youth. He advised me never to put good money into trash. He preserved that peach to remind him what a simpleton he had been born, and how thankful he was that he had gotten over his foolishness!"

Liberal-hearted Eleazer threw back his head and laughed till the tears came; and then struck out upon a long narrative of bygone days which speedily passed the time for him, even if his listener found the story a little tedious. But she would not have had him know this, nor that her arm had grown positively numb with the long strain of leading the broncho. As for the burros, they had trotted along so sedately and quietly that they seemed almost as mechanical in their action as the turning of the wheels themselves.

But Buff had grown tired of sitting still and had leaped from the vehicle, to run along

before it, as he had been accustomed to do when accompanying old Jerry on Sissmissit trips. Now and again Edith spoke to him as if fearful of losing him on the lonely route, but he would promptly respond with his short, shrill bark and spring up beside her again to lick her face, and thus assure her of his presence and love.

They had followed the longest road between the city and the ranch, thinking this the safer; and when they had reached a point where it was cut by a shallow bridge-spanned gulch, through which now ran a stream of water, Buff began a furious barking, and the horses stopped of their own accord, their front feet already upon the bridge planks.

"Hello! What's up? Something wrong, I guess. Can't see what. Can you? Bridge all right? Don't scare. I'll get out."

Eleazer stepped cautiously down and scanned the bridge, so dimly lighted by the new moon, then uttered an exclamation which made Edith forget the broncho and leap to the ground beside him.

"A woman! An old woman, I guess, right in the track! Another second and we'd have druv clean over her! My! ain't that dog

human, almost? To think there was that much sense under his homely skin. My stars, my stars and stripes! We'd have killed her, sure."

Still retaining his grasp of the reins in one hand, with the other the hackman tried to turn the prostrate figure over. But the girl was on her knees beside it, instantly, and herself narrowly escaped disaster, as the released Terror threw up his nimble heels and dashed past her up the slope and vanished over the mesa.

"Never mind. He'll get home all right. If he doesn't, a human creatur's more than a thousand bronchos. Can you make out whether she's alive or dead?"

"Oh! Mr. Mason, it's La Profetisa! And she doesn't move. How came she here, so far from the ranch, do you suppose?"

"Hmm. No accountin' for anything a woman'll do, even one so old as this Susana. Can you hold the team a minute?"

"Yes. Surely."

Indeed, the animals stood very quietly while Eleazer lifted the aged creature and placed her carefully upon the back seat, where she rested limply against the side, at imminent risk of falling out should the horses move. So Edith

climbed back into her own place and throwing an arm around the unconscious Susana, supported her as firmly as she could. Eleazer resumed his seat and they set forward again.

But neither had now anything to say. Twice that day they had been confronted with the narrow division there is between life and death, and the devout thanksgiving in each heart for the tragedies averted made only silence natural.

However, they were almost at Santa Rosa now, and having reached the level of the mesa the bays trotted eagerly forward, as if realizing that supper and a night's rest were before them. For their owner had brought their provender with him, not caring to risk the chance of an empty manger at his journey's end.

During the last half-mile Edith had felt the figure in her arms stir slightly and had gladly realized that there was still life in the helpless Profetisa. Indeed, when the wagon stopped before the court at San Rosa, Susana lifted herself, though feebly, and inquired :

“Have we come to the spot, no ? It has been a long—long way. Are you with me, daughter of the daughter of my people ?”

“Yes, Susana. It is I, Edith, Jesuita's daugh-

ter, who was sent, you know ;” answered the girl, humoring the other’s fancy. “ We are at home again, and this good man will lift you down.”

The noise of their arrival brought Ysidra to the door, and seeing a wagon outside it she hurriedly crossed the great court to meet them. There was real concern in her voice as she caught Edith’s hand and helped her down, exclaiming :

“ But I feared the harm had befallen you, heart’s dearest ! And the grandmother ? If Jesuita’s daughter had not returned by the daylight I would have left all and gone myself in search, yes. But ! your guardian angel has brought you safe again, is it not ? ”

Edith was happy indeed at this greeting, and threw her arms affectionately about her aunt’s neck, who received the embrace quietly, yet, despite her words of welcome, without demonstration.

“ Yes, everybody is safe, and I’ve a lot to tell. But Susana first ; ” and she hurriedly narrated how the woman had been found.

“ When one is as old as she, one is either all silly or all wise. The silliness came upon her

early, when she heard that you had gone. She was like a wild person, yes; upbraiding the Señora, and as for me—pouf! She would have struck at me in her rage but that it was so soon forgotten. ‘Where is the daughter from the north? Where? She and I have a task to do and time flies. Where, I say?’ It was always like that, and all at once she was gone, yes. But she is strong, no! Else how does she make the journeys from place to place. She will revive indeed. She will not die until she has gone with you, little one, to the place where the gold is hidden. In truth.”

“Oh! Aunt Ysidra! if it only might be really so!”

“Why not, pray? Is the world yet ended? Not till then will marvels cease, and what better than that our Santa Rosa becomes once more as in the past? Yet come, little one. The Señora waits and is impatient till she folds her arms about you. It is love you have brought in your hand as a gift, child. Even I who wished not your coming, who felt it was one more to slave for and to feed, behold! Because you have stopped not at the weary road and the unknown places but have done for me the

errand I could not for myself, even I love you. But not one word of news, no. Not till I have done as the Señora would wish and as my husband, Alarico. He was ever of the free hand, yes. If the little ones were but awake. Yet they sleep in happiness; only Marta, my white dove, sits in her grandmother's room so patient. My thanks, beloved, ten thousand thanks!"

With that this strange woman, who had hitherto been so sullen and distant of manner, bent over Edith's hand and kissed it tenderly; then quickly lifted herself and slipping an arm about Susana's shoulders helped her across the garden and into the house.

"Now, don't you worry about me, Edith. I'm an old stager an' can 'fend for myself. I'll just step back to the stable, or drive there, ruther. There'll be room enough, any way, and I'll put the team out. The burros can be tethered right on the mesa. They live on next to nothin' always. I hear Terror trottin' and snorting around back, so he's come home; and he'll look out for Terror every time, you believe. If the aunt can fix me up some sort of shake-down we'll be as snug as pigs in clover; and to-morrow—hooray! for a gold mine!"

It was many years since lights had burned so late at Santa Rosa as on that night; and long since so bountiful a supper had been spread there. For Edith had told her aunt about the stock of good things she had brought from town; purchased in part with the money Ysidra had given her, part with her own, and largely added to, without her knowledge, by the orders of her generous friend, Madam Eastman.

While the meal was preparing Mr. Mason was arranging for the comfort of the animals in the great stable, while Buff was introduced to the Señora and made to do all his tricks for her benefit. To little Marta he seemed the most wonderful of beasts; and, being a dog of discernment who knew a friend when he saw one, he promptly acknowledged her appreciation by crossing to where she sat upon the hearth and licking her face. Oddly enough, in a country where dogs were so plentiful the young Garcelons had never owned one. Indeed, though Edith did not guess it, until that moment the Dona Rosalia had hated a dog on sight.

“But this beast, that has traveled three thousand miles out of pure affection—behold!

it is a marvel. He is worthy of highest honor. He must sleep softly and feed daintily, no ? ”

In vain Buff's mistress tried to explain the very matter-of-fact manner in which he had made his memorable journey, “simply sent to me because he had made himself an intolerable nuisance at home without me ; ” the lady utterly refused to take any other view of the affair than that which pleased her fancy. She was even delighted with his rowdyish street fight, and declared that now they had such a protector on the premises she should no longer fear the insolence of even tourists ; but when they became too inquisitive would neither retire from view nor pay any further heed to them than merely to set the dog upon them. “ What he did to the goat, out of pure courage, he will do to these impudent folk for love of us. A dog so intelligent that he can cross a continent by himself ; well he is a regiment of soldiers in his small self, no ? ”

At which Mr. Mason winked at Edith, as if she would better let the matter so rest. Meaning no disrespect to his hostess, but feeling that anything which secured for such an outrageous

animal as poor Buff had proved himself while the hackman's own guest, a decent welcome should be left alone.

It was not till supper was over and Edith had told for the second time the story of her eventful day that she was able to seek Ysidra in her kitchen and satisfy the mother's hungry heart with talk of Alarico.

"Everything is going to be so nice, Aunt Ysidra. It is, indeed. You would not know the boy. He is as gentle as a lamb, and seems to fairly adore his aunt Dolores. He is all eagerness to please her, and she has shown him that he can best do that by being what he should be here. He will make no more wagers on anything, and he will go to work and help to support his people."

"But how, child? Not by the sea, no! Oh! not by the sea!"

"No, dear. Not by the sea. He fears it, I think;" answered Edith gravely, seeing the shrinking terror on her aunt's worn face. "He says that losing that money and breaking his leg have been the best things ever happened to him. They've make him stop and think; and he realizes that there may be others in the

world almost as smart and handsome as Alarico Garcelon, Gentleman, of California."

The words were out before she knew it and Edith caught her breath. She had had a fleeting picture of her bombastic cousin in his insolent pride and conceit and had put the thought into words. But she need not have feared that her plainness would have hurt her aunt. It simply passed away unnoticed. Ysidra was always preoccupied and not of very nimble wit. She had quickly enough understood the words "smart and handsome," and had herself conjured up a picture of her idol as she last beheld him and as he must now be in his hospital bed.

But her heart was tender toward this stranger girl from the north, who was a Garcelon yet seemed to think that she, the household drudge, was a creature who had, also, the sensibilities which could suffer and enjoy. It was a very much happier face that was raised toward Edith, as she at last said good night, than the girl had seen before; and though the "good times," which she prophesied were coming, were as yet very vaguely outlined even in her own mind, she went to her room with a far lighter heart

than she had fancied, on the night before, could ever be possible at Santa Rosa.

“After all, it was like a regular home-coming, and my beautiful grandmother didn’t seem half so much disposed toward dying now, as toward living, and even joining in the to-morrow’s search for the Garcelon gold mine! Yet Marta said she didn’t remember when the dear woman had ever been outside the courtyard. ‘It must have been before I was born,’ the child said. Imagine! A perfectly healthy person staying in one place so long. But then, Buff, you see she didn’t have me—nor you—you base and false pretender you!”

Then she gave him an ecstatic hug and smoothed a place for him on the foot of her bed. He had utterly declined to be separated from her, and though the Señora had inquired if the girl did not feel afraid to sleep in the same room with a real dog, she had raised no objection and Buff carried his point.

CHAPTER XIX

AN EXCITING JOURNEY

AT breakfast the next morning, with a cheerfulness most delightful to her household, Dona Rosalia announced :

“I, too, will go in the Señor Mason’s carriage to this mountain of prophecy. Why not? Am I not still, save for little Alarico, still the head of the Garcelons, I? It is fitting, yes, that I should be present at this so important discovery. If it is truth Susana says then indeed will the old times come again to Santa Rosa. Ah! you shall see, my Jesuita’s daughter, what is the race from which you sprung. We will restore the old chapel first, and the stranger chamber, to bring a blessing on the home. All the great rooms shall be made new and we will open the doors wide to all the world. That is, yes, the world which is worth knowing. Then, too, shall the great mission school that Dolores desires be built and endowed forever; so that

if decay again comes to us the poor shall lack nothing. Ah ! I am a girl again ! Alarico, my son is gone, but Edith, my daughter, is returned to me out of the north. There is the hand of Providence in all things, and in this, also."

They listened in silence but with increasing enthusiasm. Eleazer, alone, retained all his former skepticism concerning any "mine," but entered none the less heartily into the preparations for this journey of discovery.

It was so warm and the sunshine so bright that the Señora came out to the wagon, wearing her thin white gown, with the lace mantilla over her head, its folds fastened back with sprays of some lavender-colored flowers that were infinitely becoming, and gave that individual touch to her costume which Edith had found so charming.

Indeed, she could not then repress her pleasure, and threw her arms about the lady's neck with an impulsive admiration :

"Oh ! you dear, beautiful creature ! it doesn't seem as if you could be a real grandmother ! I never saw anybody like you, never !" Then she turned to the hackman, exclaiming : "Just imagine Maria, or even Aunty Comfort, setting

out for a drive so daintily dressed ! They'd think it a positive sin, wouldn't they ?”

“I guess they would. But it takes more imagination than I've got to think of it, yet I like it. My compliments, Seeñory, and hoping our trip will turn out as fine as you look.”

This was an unprecedented speech for the practical Eleazer and he actually blushed as he made it. Not so its recipient. She merely bowed in her inimitably graceful manner and gently said :

“A thousand thanks, Señor, for your appreciation. All the good gifts come from Heaven and it is right we should use them, yes. What is age or youth ? Are not both a part of life and therefore excellent, no ? But enough ! La Profetisa sits by me, on this most comfortable of cushions. Such a carriage will be again at San Rosa after the gold is found. Edith and Marta on the burros and the wicked Terror punished at home in his paddock. Ysidra with the little ones will wait our return, for a drive will make us all eager for a fine dinner, yes.”

Indeed, it was so long since the lady had been away from the old adobe that the event of her doing so now excited her as greatly as

even little Marta, who felt that her cup of joy was overflowing.

When she had been put upon the burro which Eleazer considered the gentler of the pair, and Edith had mounted the other, the little girl's face grew younger and merrier every minute; and her cousin, watching her exclaimed:

"Now, you little Thoughtful, you begin to seem like a normal child, and not a family caretaker. Forget, for one morning, that there are small brothers and sisters to worry about and be as jolly as—Juan, even! Whew! I was nearly off that time. This is my first ride burro-back, too, you know; so let's see which can do the best. After a little, when we've learned the knack of sticking on, we'll have a race—though not for money, my dear! Alarico has given us enough of that sort of business. Heigho! Isn't it fine? and doesn't our grandmother seem like a child let loose from school?"

"Maybe. But I never saw a school, I, you know."

"Never mind. You're going to see one and be in one sometime, gold mine or no gold mine."

To be a student and "learn things out of

books" was silent Marta's great ambition; though she had cherished her desire quite secretly, not even worrying Ysidra with it, since she saw no possible way of its accomplishment. But she had, in a moment of confidence, and upon hearing her new cousin read a charming story from one of the books in the old bookcase, confided her aspiration to Edith; whose heart reproached her that she had herself so little valued the opportunities she had possessed, while she earnestly wished that she might secure such for the grave little girl beside her.

"I once heard my grandfather say that if a person greatly desired some good thing and kept the idea firmly fixed in his mind that he would certainly accomplish it—unless some extraordinary circumstances prevented. That the object would be gradually attained, almost without one's knowing just how. So, we'll keep thinking you're to have an education, my dear, and some time you'll get it. Now, I can manage this saddle better than at first. Let's try a little faster gait, will you?"

They set off swiftly and with every rod's advance the color deepened in Marta's face; till from being the plainest of all her family,

Edith suddenly discovered that she was, after all, the most beautiful. None other of the brood had that wide, intelligent brow, that firm, sweet mouth, that deep questioning look in the dark eyes.

“Well, if a tiny bit of happiness like this can transform the darling so, what would she be if she were care-free and happy all the time? We must find that gold mine—we must, we must! Then everybody can have exactly what they want. Come on. Another run, if you please, small donkey-girl!”

Even old Susana was infused with the enthusiasm of her companions and sat bolt upright beside the Señora, chattering incessantly. Much of her talk was a jumble of several dialects and difficult to understand, even by the Dona Rosalia, who had known the aged woman always. But she was evidently as happy as the rest, and her shrill cackling laughter often provoked to laughter on his own part the good hackman, who could “make nary head nor tail of all she jabbered.”

As they neared the mountain, which rose so like a pyramid from the table-land, her excitement increased and it was with difficulty that

the Señora was able to keep her in the wagon. She had no idea of danger, apparently, and more than once attempted to step out over the wheel while the vehicle was in rapid motion.

Each time this happened, however, Buff took a share in the affair ; springing up and barking at her so viciously that she shrunk back into her place, more from fear of him than because of the Señora's remonstrances ; but at length the last point where a wagon could pass was reached and Mr. Mason stopped his team. Then he got out and turned to La Profetisa :

“ Well, Madam, here we be ! Now what ? Think you can manage to ride a burro ? If you can an' the Seeñory the other, the younkets can walk, as I will, an'—hooray ! for the mine of Golcondy ! ”

He held out his arms to lift her down, also, but she was too nimble for him. However she managed to do it, she leaped over the wheel and landed upon the ground without any broken bones, though her action turned the others' faces pale with fear. But once on the ground she could not so readily rise and when Eleazer had helped her to her feet again they, for a time, utterly refused to support her.

"My stars and stripes, old lady! That's just the way a baby acts when it first tries to use its legs. I guess you'd better let that be a lesson to you an' not try to do everything without help even if you be the smartest old woman in Californy. There. That better? Gettin' control of 'em again, are you? All right. Want to ride? No? Ruther walk? Well, travel along, but reckon you'd best let me kind of keep a hold of you, to steady you. This here trail we've got to follow ain't so smooth as a hotel floor, is it?"

Susana disdained any reply, even if she heard the man's words. She had grown even more excited than ever and her eyes glittered fiercely from out the withered face, while her straight gray hair had escaped from her blanket head-covering and blew about in the fresh breeze that had sprung up.

"Oh! Marta! doesn't she look like a regular witch! I declare I feel real—spooky! She might have stepped out of Macbeth!"

"I don't know, I never saw a witch, and I'm not acquainted with Macbeth," answered the girl, seriously.

Edith laughed. "Well, you shall become ac-

quainted with him as soon as possible, you dear. He's fine company and I have him in my trunk. A presentation copy of him, and his friends, that I brought. But watch! Our grandmother is going to ride my burro, after all. I'm not sorry to walk, though, are you? And I must keep this map Susana gave me in plain sight. Oh! I'm so excited and goose-fleshy! Think of it! A plain Sissmissit girl going on such a strange business as this!"

Indeed, a curious feeling of mingled awe and amusement had settled upon all the party save La Profetisa. She had promptly recovered from her slight accident and was now traveling forward and downward into a picturesque valley behind the first mountain. On the opposite side of the deep cañon that bordered the gradual slope over which she led the way, rose other mountains, which were bare of verdure and formed by mighty rocks that seemed almost to have been cut by men—or giants—and heaped into their present shapes. Far more imposing and terrible to sight than if their steep sides had been softened by herbage of any sort; and without the strangeness of their errand to impress them, not one of the

beholders would have felt like speech just then.

The ground on their side the cañon was level enough for the passage of the burros, and the Señora rode one while Eleazer led the other. Susana strode ahead, apparently growing fresher rather than wearier with every step's advance, while the girls, with Buff, brought up the rear.

Edith carried her map, well spread out, and together with Marta studied it continually; and when after what seemed an interminable distance their guide diverted slightly in her course and passed under a pile of overhanging rocks, Edith caught her breath; then exclaimed:

"It is! that's the first turn in the drawing. See! see!"

Marta did see and grew white. "I'm afraid!" she whispered.

"Afraid of getting the means to an education?"

The passage widened into a cave-like apartment and then narrowed again; and before they observed it, so intent were they in studying the surroundings, they had passed from daylight into a twilight gloom. Even this faint

light was soon to disappear, for without any wavering Susana moved steadily forward like one who knew her way well.

"I reckon it's about time to tie these animals and strike a light, ain't it, Seeñory?" asked Eleazer, and his voice sounded queerly in his own ears.

By main strength, the two girls prevented Susana from going on without the others, but when Eleazer had lighted the two small lanterns he had provided and had securely fastened the patient burros, they released their hold of her and she immediately hurried on again.

"Seems as if she were set on springs, doesn't it? She's so excited that she looks fairly wild. Did you see how her eyes gleamed in the lantern-light? She must often have been here, I should think, she knows the way so well. She never seems a bit perplexed, does she? Isn't it delightfully scarey? I feel—feel—Why, Marta! little Marta! Are you actually crying? But, child, we're safe. Here. Come. Take hold of Mr. Mason's hand and I'll carry one of his lanterns. He's so nice you needn't fear. It won't seem so dark, either, after we get used to it."

“Oh ! I wish I hadn’t come !” sobbed Marta, clutching Edith’s arm so that it hurt. “I’m so afraid !”

Edith’s own stout heart began to beat a trifle more rapidly than usual, but she was not one to regret anything she had once decided to be right, and she did her utmost to cheer Marta and soothe her evident suffering.

Their underground journey lay through narrow channels, over rough and smooth, across roomy chambers which were so wonderful that Edith longed to stop and examine them, though she could not, for always before her hurried the now half-frenzied Susana, closely followed by her grandmother ; while Eleazer, half-dragging the terrified Marta, kept as near the women as he could. So, with Buff beside her, Edith held her own lantern aloft and walked behind the rest.

It is not every such adventure which reveals that the truth has been told—as this one did. For if, as yet no gold was found, they did indeed reach, after a weary progress, and by a steady ascent upward through the heart of the mountain, a curious vault where the rocks were piled exactly as represented in the painted

map. And what was that which Edith suddenly perceived?

"A number! a number! See there? that bit of vermilion on that jagged white stone? There is one on the map, too. There is! there is! Oh! we've found it, we've found it! you dear old Susana, you blessed!"

Impulsive Edith caught the aged woman in her arms and hugged her gratefully, but Susana shook herself free as soon as possible, and as if she had reached the extreme of her power, sank down in a startling collapse. But only for a moment was attention diverted from the great object of this romantic journey, and both the Señora and little Marta became almost as excited as Edith.

Mr. Mason had, also, at first appeared to be amazed by the successful termination of their search; though his enthusiasm was short-lived; and seeing that he soon ceased to sympathize with her delight, the disappointed New Englander exclaimed:

"Why, Mr. Mason! Aren't you glad? I thought you'd be as pleased as we could possibly be. You seemed——"

"Just what I was, my girl. But—I'm an old

miner, I am. I've tried every sort of mining under the sky, I guess, and now I come to examine closer this ain't no gold mine you've found. Ain't ary sign of gold or any other valuable metal as I see. Nothin' but a solid mass of rocks 'twould take half the dynamite in Californy to blow up, and just the same when done. I guess them stun go clean down into China, the other side the globe, and we've had a tiresome journey for nothin'. Except, of course, the satisfaction of having the matter settled. My stars! Look at Susana!"

The old creature did, indeed, now require instant attention, and the Señora forgot everything else in caring for her.

"How dreadful, if she has led us here to meet her own death, yes! So faithful and so good! Oh! for some water!"

"There, Seeñory, don't look so scared. I guess she'll come to, in a minute. And I'm thankful to say here's water. Right in this flask. I'm a temperance man myself, and I never travel nowhere without a big bottle of God's own restorer in my pocket. Use the top of the flask for a cup. There! I'll hold her head up whilst you force a few drops down

her throat. She's overdone. That's all. But didn't she travel? Wouldn't have believed it possible if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

The marvel of really finding the spot depicted upon the map of skin was quite forgotten now in anxiety concerning their venerable guide; and after a time that seemed very long she did open her eyes again and show signs of recovery. Then they redoubled their exertions, and after a half-hour's labor of rubbing and giving her drinks, she was able to raise herself and sit upright.

"Now! Strike while the iron's hot! Or while the spark of life burns in her. I'll carry her back to where we left the burros and then try to fix her on one of them. If we can once get her back to the wagon we'll be all right. Out in the air she'll feel better, too. Now, plan how you'll walk, and one of you girls go ahead with one lantern and the Seeñory carry the other. It best be you, Edith, with your dog. He'll likely smell the road out for us if so be we forget it ourselves. But I guess we sha'n't. I took pretty good notice as we came along; for I got lost once in a cave and I ain't never forgot the experience. Never will, neither. My

stars ! little Marta ! We ain't lost now. We're merely goin' straight home."

Edith rolled up her map and carefully secured it to her person ; then taking the lantern Eleazer handed her set out to retrace her steps. But she was so disappointed she could not help a few tears coming ; though as these blinded her sight she promptly conquered them and pressed forward as rapidly as Eleazer was able to follow, burdened as he was.

Fortunately they did not lose the direct road outward, and to all the party there seemed a wonderful glory about the sunshine and free air of the outer world when, after a slow and weary passage, they again emerged from the cave.

"The Cave of Disappointment ! wasn't it, Marta ? But—never mind. It may all come right yet."

"We are justly punished for our covetousness. I, yes, I, at least, should have been wiser. When my thoughts should have been upon my devotions I let them wander upon the gold that perisheth. And if we are permitted to get our beloved Susana safe to San Rosa again I will possess my soul in peace and in penitence for my undue greed."

Edith looked sorrowfully at her beautiful grandmother. Beautiful still, in spite of the fact that her dainty gown was sadly draggled and soiled, and that the fine mantilla had been caught and torn upon the projecting rocks which had bordered their underground way. But saddest of all to the eager girl was the fact that she could not now hope to see the Señora surrounded by the comforts to which she had once been used, and that would have been so grateful to her declining years.

Yet for herself the Dona Rosalia had no regret. She felt that she had been silly and blameworthy, and that by indulging the Profetisa's whims she had allowed the poor creature to risk her life.

So, it was a very quiet company which gathered, at last, about the table where Ysidra had placed an excellent dinner; and if it had not been for their unusual exertions nobody would have had much appetite to eat it. However, they did despatch it quite promptly; and even Susana was able to take a small portion of soup and a cup of coffee. But she had not spoken once since her fainting spell in the cave, and the Señora was extremely anxious concern-

ing her. So when dinner was over she held a consultation with Mr. Mason, with the result that when he drove away again toward the city, La Profetisa lay upon a cot that he had fixed in his wagon, and with the hospital where Dolores Garcelon nursed, as her destination.

Then the Dona Rosalia kissed her granddaughters, again expressed her regret that she should have set them so "foolish an example," and retired to her own apartments.

The disappointed Ysidra lapsed into a gloom which nothing could brighten; and life at Santa Rosa, in spite of its flowers and its sunshine, settled into a dreary monotony that was very irksome to Edith Hale, though patiently accepted as a matter of course by Marta and the other children.

Mr. Mason came once, about a week after the visit to the cave, and reported that he had seen La Profetisa safely placed at St. Luke's, where she was receiving all needed attention; and that Alarico's broken bones were knitting satisfactorily and that he would soon be at home. But after he had gone there was no sign of visitors; the hackman's patrons then happening to prefer trips in other directions; while Madam East-

man, who might have brought him, was ailing, he reported, and apt to leave for Las Vegas at any moment.

"If it were not for her burros we should have nothing to do!" exclaimed Edith, on the evening after Mr. Mason's one visit.

"Yes; but we are not to use them, no. Our grandmother and my mother have spoken together and the end is: the little beasts may stay at pasture, yes, but none of the children must ever sit upon their backs again. That is what my mother Ysidra says."

"Oh! Marta! Isn't that too bad! We could have had such lovely rides, over the mesa that every day grows more beautiful. Oh! would it do no good to ask them again?"

But Marta shook her head gravely.

"What my mother and my grandmother say is always done. Yes. I have never known it any other way, I."

"Oh! dear! I did want to put all this mine-story out of mind; but if I have nothing to do I shall keep thinking about it all the time. Oh! I do hate to give that all up; and since the map was so true——"

Marta interrupted, in horror:

“But it is the sin, yes! Else would old Susana never have been stricken speechless; and there is a curse upon the whole matter, my mother Ysidra says. Also, that if the good God wished to make us rich He could have put the gold right in our hands instead of burying it beneath great rocks in a dark cave. But, no. He means us to be but poor, and one should be content. Talk no more of the place, dear, dear Edith, else I shall not be let to speak with you at all; and the lessons, are they not enough?” For Edith had already begun her cousins’ education.

CHAPTER XX

FAVOR AND DISFAVOR

ALARICO lay sprawled under the shade of a palm tree behind the old adobe and Edith Hale sat near him, idly plaiting a wreath of blossoms for little Juan, curled up by her side.

The faces of both cousins were grave and the expression of the lad's almost hopeless. Watching him intently for a time the girl, at last, spoke.

"Do shorten up your countenance, Larry. It doesn't help matters to wear such a despairing look. Things seem to have reached their very worst, just now, and there must come a change of some sort. Let us make it a change for the better."

"Pshaw ! You can make it a change, yes. You should go back to your friends in the north. There is no need for you to starve because we must. No. If you write them the letter I will get it stamped, in some way, and they will



EDITH SAT PLAITING A WREATH

gladly send the money for your return, yes. Write it to-day, why not?"

"Oh! you inhospitable! Going to turn me out like that! Are you then so tired of me, yes?" she asked, imitating his manner of speech.

"Light of the old adobe, what shall I say that will convince you how much we all care to have you here, yes? But—to see you starve—ah! that is not to be borne. In truth."

Edith tossed her wreath over the dark head of the sleeping baby and laughed. So merrily that Alarico looked up in anger and would have gone away but she laid a restraining hand upon his arm and he fell back again.

"Look here, my cousin. Let's hear no more, think no more, of that horrid word—starving. And I laugh because it does me good to hear you talk extravagantly once more. You have been so good, so very good and common-sensey for so long that I began to fear for you. It was so unnatural, you see. No, Larry. I'm in earnest enough, yet I will not believe but that a way out can be found."

"It surely can be for you. I've been thinking it, too, this long. Indeed, yes. You should go home."

"I thought San Rosa had become my home, Larry."

"If it could keep you without all this misery, yes. But for you there is no need."

Edith dropped her chin in her hands as she rested her elbows on her knees and answered him.

"If I should only be a burden to you all I would not stay. But I do not mean to be that, and I, too, am Garcelon. Please remember that, my friend. Also, that in coming here I was obeying the command of my mother and father. If the way had been all pleasant for me you would not have objected, I think. Then am I such a weak, wishy-washy sort of creature that I can't face a little trouble as bravely as any other Garcelon, even the young Señor Alarico?"

"You are pleased to be sarcastic, yes."

"I am pleased to be anything you choose to fancy, until I can rouse you to do something."

"What, pray, Señorita Garcelon-Hale?"

"Work."

"Humph! basta! how? where? when?"

"Listen. You are rousing, I see. I said I was Garcelon, too. I am. Just as much and as lovingly as I am Hale. I love my beautiful

grandmother as well now as I do my saintly grandfather up in Sissmissit. I love every one of you and I honor my aunt Ysidra more than any other woman I ever knew."

Alarico sat up now, quickly. He was thoroughly astonished by these words and had his cousin been any other girl would not have believed them. But there was perfect sincerity in her brown eyes and, as if to impress him with a fact that she believed had escaped his notice, she repeated :

"I honor my aunt Ysidra Garcelon more than any other woman I ever knew. It is almost nine months since I came to Santa Rosa, and in all that time I have never seen one single act of selfishness on her part. She has toiled for all of us early and late. She has hidden her sorrows in her own heart. She has gone without the food she needed more than any of us lest we should suffer hunger. She has gone without sleeping that she might weave her bits of lace and sell them to buy us bread. Now, I think it's time to turn the tables and work for her."

"How, I ask again?" demanded Alarico, a flush rising on his thin cheek at the picture of

his mother a stranger's hand had drawn but which he had never observed till then.

"Let us go to San Pedro and ask for it. I've heard they could never get enough good hands—good ones, mind, such as the Garcelons!—and I'm sure they would employ us. These burros could carry us back and forth and our wages would keep the family in meal, if in nothing better. Then——"

"Your grandfather——" suggested the lad, though he blushed as he did so.

Edith did not notice his embarrassment, but answered his half-uttered suggestion.

"No, he can't help us. He would, gladly, if he could. That is he could do but little and his own salary is very, very small. It is a little country village, you know, and the people are none of them rich, except one or two families. I know that it takes a great deal of thought and the best management on Aunt Comfort's part to make both ends meet at the end of the year, and come out free from debt. Debt would almost kill my honest old grandsire and I'll not ask him to incur it for me—till I've tried every other plan. That bank's failing and all my little fortune—that my parents had saved for

me—being lost has aged him greatly, Eli wrote, just from the worry of it. I wouldn't have him know how things are with us here, not for anything."

"The Señor Mason; would he not advance something, yes? He seems to love you like his own, as who would not!"

"He's as poor as any of us, almost, just now, I guess. He says the boomers bewitched him. Any way he put all the money he had in the savings bank into real estate in an out-of-the-way spot that some folks fancied would promptly become a city. He says he often goes out and visits the burying-ground where his cash lies buried and ponders on his mistakes. Then in the summer, too, there has been no business for him, and his pretty bays have been eating their heads off. In that respect we are richer than he, for our animals have food enough on the mesa. I sometimes wish that we, too, could eat grass!"

Things were, indeed, at a very low ebb with the house of Garcelon. It had been an extremely hot summer and the little garden, planted so enthusiastically in the early spring, had produced but little available food. There

had been too little water in the old well to waste it on the crops, and though there had been considerable fruit this had not been a very substantial diet for a healthy household.

Ysidra's lace work had not sold well. No strangers were left in the city, and the few resident patrons could not afford large prices. Yet this had supplemented the small amount of money in her purse, and until now there had been food of some sort ready at every meal. Now the end was reached. There was no food left and no money with which to buy more; and unless they were really to starve, somebody must go to work and earn wages.

"I don't think our grandmother will permit us to do that, Edithe. It would be too hard for you, and as for me—I am a worthless fellow and always have been. If old Susana had only really led us to a gold mine!"

"But she didn't; and I'm going to find a mine right in my two hands. To-morrow I am going to San Pedro and ask for work."

"If the grandmother says no?"

"If—anything. Unless I am taken suddenly ill and can't. God never meant two perfectly healthy people like you and me to sit down

and wail when there was so much work in the world waiting honest people to do it."

"Well, then. If you go I must!" sighed Alarico, lugubriously.

"Exactly. I should think you no true descendant of the old Californians if you allowed me to go alone. We must be up before the sun, though, and—and it isn't going to be very funny, you know."

"Well! no girl shall ever shame me by her energy!" cried the boy, proudly, and Edith knew the matter was settled.

But though she had prophesied difficulties she had scarcely realized how great they would be. Fortunately they found a short-cut across country between Santa Rosa and San Pedro, which reduced the distance to eight miles, but even this was a long ride before beginning a day's toil and a longer one, seemingly, after the day was over. The work was easily secured; Edith to assist in the olive-packing department, and Alarico in the lemon orchards. The picking season was at its height and the wages paid seemed fabulously large to the New-England reared girl; so that at the end of the first week the pair of toilers were able to carry home to

Ysidra a sum quite sufficient to keep hunger away, and Edith was overjoyed at the success of her experiment.

“Why, Larry boy! Just think! After we’ve lived on so little how easily we could begin to lay up something. Don’t you suppose we might in time get enough to have the ranch irrigated? If we could, if only once we could get the precious water on our own land, we could raise lemons and olives and—and everything. Then we would sell them and—heigho! Who’d care for anybody’s old gold mine, then? And if Madam Eastman should ever have the water brought to her ranch—if she and grandmother should grow to be friends, that is if the Madam comes back another year, if——”

“Don’t send any more of those gigantic ‘ifs’ flying in my face, cousin mine. You’re the bravest little girl in the world, and your coming to Santa Rosa has been the salvation of the Garcelons. Yet—you forget. One must not only eat, but one must wear clothes. It is long since there was anything new at Santa Rosa.”

“Oh! well. All in good time. One thing—we’re learning just how to take care of such fruits when we do raise them; and now, since

that notion has come into my head, I don't think I'd give up working at San Pedro even if we did happen to find the mine."

A few days later there was a half-holiday at the San Pedro ranch, and Edith begged a big sheet of packing paper from the manager of the lemon houses on which to write a characteristic letter to her old schoolmate, Derby Saunders. His health was not just then as good as his parents would have liked, and he had been making inquiries about ranch life in the sunny country where Edith now dwelt.

"For you see," Derby had written, "I shall never make anything but a farmer of some sort; and I've no notion of anything so small as New Hampshire. Not that it's not the dearest old state in the Union but—I'm wild for California. Your grandfather says you've gone to study lemon culture on one of the biggest ranches down there and he's very pleased about it. He says: 'As long as she could not conveniently go on with a different education, I admire her ambition to do the best she can.' We all, your old friends, you know, think you're dreadfully smart; but couldn't you have learned it all without that sort of apprenticing yourself to it?"

Any way, write all you know and I'll coax my folks to come down there this next winter, if I can. I suppose you know Letty Squibbett enters college this autumn. Whew! if I had the brains that girl has I wouldn't be a mere farmer, not even in that wonderful land of the olive and myrtle. (See Byron, or some other poet.) Good-by, from Derby."

Edith began her letter with a sketch of a lemon-house, which she described as a "lot of houses within a house. All air-tight, except where they're ventilated—through the top, as we do the ice-houses up north. Did you know that the lemons were not sold fresh from the tree as we used to think? I wish you could see the care with which they are gathered. Only the most trusted workmen are ever allowed to pick or 'clip' them, and they do it so carefully. The men usually can tell at a glance whether the lemons are right for picking, and that means when they are of the right size—so that about three hundred will fill a box, of a certain size, as they are marketed. They don't pay any attention to the color or ripeness or anything except size. The clippers stand on ladders and have a shallow oval basket hung

to this. In the bottom of the basket is a piece of burlap, and when about seventy-five are clipped this basket is handed down to an assistant who carries it to the picking box. They put a piece of burlap in this box, too, and slide one small end of the basket into it. Then they sort of wiggle the lemons out of the basket on to the burlap, as gently as if they were eggs and would break.

“My cousin Alarico is now a clipper’s assistant, and he got himself docked a whole lot of money the other day, because he was careless and bruised the lemons. I’ve been promoted to sorting, or putting in trays in the curing house. A great many trays are filled, or covered by one depth of lemons—Oh! that doesn’t sound right but you must guess some things, Derby. It will sharpen your wits! and I’d rather show you the thing than write it all. Well, these trays are put in one of the little inside rooms of the house, a pile as high as one can reach, one above the other. These rooms inside are tight as can be, except for the slats in the tops. Around them or over them is another house built, and a hall runs all round the inner rooms between their walls and the outside

walls and the windows to that are tight shut. There the lemons are left to be cured—just as if they'd been sick, and it takes a long, long time. When the manager finds that enough are cured he ships them east for you to make your lemonade."

"What are you wasting your time writing such a long, queer letter for, Edith?" interrupted Alarico. "Do you know the boss of the olives is wanting you? He's going to give you a chance at the pickling if you like, and that will pay you better than the other work. Only, you've got to keep your wits about you every minute. If you do right you'll be over, or boss of, another lot of girls, and fine feathers, is it not! Come, he is waiting."

So Edith folded her paper and went with her cousin; to have the pickling of the famous olives of San Pedro explained to her, and because of the exceeding care with which she had followed her simpler task to receive this important charge.

The superintendent explained:

"After the olives are carefully picked from the trees—not pulled or raked off—we put them immediately into this solution of lye and leave

them exactly four hours. Then we run off the lye—through the spigots, so—and immediately again—never delay in your olive curing—fill the vats with clear water. This water will become discolored and is then drawn off and the lye solution put in again, a fresh solution each time. You are to see that this is done exactly as I tell you, and to have charge of a certain number of vats. We are anxious to train girls or women to this work, hoping for fewer accidents from carelessness or rough handling.”

“I should think lye would make them—horrid. As bad as a fresh olive, indeed. I tried those, I remember, the first day I came here.”

“No. It is not strong enough, but is used to firm the fruit and extract the bitterness. The brine is made very weak, at first, and afterward increased in strength. It is to be measured and prepared exactly. After the olives have been soaked in water several days, till all the lye is taken out, then the brine is put on: four ounces of salt to a gallon of water. This first, if you mistake here you will spoil a great crop and cost our boss a pile of money. Are you willing to take care?”

"I am willing, but afraid I am not wise enough."

"The art requires little wisdom though exact obedience and unfailing watchfulness. Your wages will nearly double and you will be learning a great industry. I've heard a little about your ambition to do something with the San Rosa land, and now's your chance to learn. Alarico Garcelon should learn, also, but he is impatient and headstrong. He cannot make himself a servant to anybody or for any purpose. That is, not for long at a time. If he does not change somewhat we will not be able to give him any other work here, except that of a vacquero or even a herder. That wouldn't suit his high stomach, I fancy. Will you try?"

"Yes. I will try."

The superintendent was better pleased by her answer than if it had been a confident one. He had watched her closely and delighted in her exactitude as much as he had been displeased by the I-know-it-all air of her cousin. Yet the lad had good points, and when he did force himself to work at all steadily, his capability was great.

But that very day disaster lay in wait for

him. He had been sent to work in one of the lemon houses, and for a time kept faithfully at his task; then another assistant happening to say something which the Californian interpreted to be a reflection upon himself and the pretensions of his family, his blood rose and a haughty demand, followed:

“Prove it! now! here!” and with warlike mien he rolled his sleeves and prepared for instant combat.

The contestant was of another nation, none the less hot-blooded; and in a moment they were deep in a silent bitter struggle. On either side there was no give up; and they gradually worked themselves along the narrow hall of the outer house till they reached the platform and the unrailed steps. This platform was several feet high and narrow. The wrestlers reached the edge and—were over it. For a little time both remained upon the ground, stunned by the sudden fall; then Alarico rose and limped away, with a very battered countenance and a sprained ankle, which gave him such excruciating pain as made him forget everything else.

The other man, a newcomer and probationer, also slunk away, fearing the reprimand of an

overseer, for discipline was strict at San Pedro, and just then "fighting with or without cause" sternly prohibited. Neither paid any heed to the lemon house, or to the fact that they had left it open to the damaging effects of light and heat, besides the strong draught from a stiff breeze that had sprung up. This particular building was rather remote from the main part and did not attract the attention of anybody until nightfall, by which time a very great damage had been wrought.

Word of the discovery of this injury came to Alarico as he was saddling Terror for his homeward ride, that was to be a solitary one that evening, since Edith had long since finished her letter and hurried away, presumably to share what remained of her holiday with her cousins.

"Basta! That's what comes of trying to make one's self a laborer! If I had not been so industrious, I, and worked the over-time for a pay when I should have taken holiday with the rest, it would not have happened, no. My ankle! But it is worse than the broken bones! Ugh! ouch! well, what of it? I can labor no more here, you say, yes? Then take my com-

pliments to your master, the compliments of a Garcelon, who owned all this country before he was born, and when he needs my service further let him seek it. So? As for the trumpery fruit—why, some day, when my ships come home, I will repay. Yes. Adios!”

The handsome youth rode away with an insolent disdain that raised a smile upon the faces of the beholders.

“Doesn’t that fellow beat the lot? He’s completely in the wrong, and yet he bears himself as if we were all dirt beneath his horse’s hoofs! Well, my lad! I reckon you’ll toil no more here, unless it be in the humble capacity of stable boy. Even that is doubtful.”

Edith, meanwhile, had ridden slowly away upon her burro, but not toward home as her cousin had supposed. Instead of taking the short cut thither she turned aside and struck into the valley between the mountains, and finally gained that point of entrance through which Susana had once guided her into the Pyramid.

“It’s the very spot, Buff dear; and my time is quite my own for the rest of the day. I shall always believe that there is some sort of wealth

hidden here, even if, at first, we did miss all traces of it. You and I, little doggie, will try now for ourselves, and we may achieve the glory of discovery! I'm going to ride in as far as I can. I've put three whole candles and some matches in the top of that great basket of fruit the manager gave me for my grandmother. Won't she be pleased with it? won't it be more the attention, even, than the gift? Old people, though she doesn't seem old—but she and grandfather, too, do like to be remembered. I saved my lunch to eat as a supper in here and you shall share it. We fed well at noon at the ranch house, for whenever it's holiday, they say the family send out a nice feast to the work folks. I'm one of the work folks now, Buff, but I like it. And I've been promoted, sir. You must treat me with due respect, boy, and not jump up and lick my face every time the whim takes you. That hurts my new dignity, you see, though it warms my heart. Oh! Buff! you are the very blessedest dog in all the world! And you and I are going to find a gold mine all by ourselves, this time! That makes it even more delightfully spooky and exciting than it was before. Have you courage, good fellow?

For suppose—just suppose, my Buff, that we should take the wrong turn? We'd be lost in a cave, Buff, lost! and who knows when we should get out? Yet, it's worth venturing and—here goes!”

CHAPTER XXI

TO THE RESCUE

Nobody at San Pedro expected to see Alarico Garcelon there again after his ruinous carelessness of that half-holiday; yet early on the second morning following he rode furiously up to the manager's office and demanded excitedly:

"Is my cousin Edithe here?"

"I don't know. I haven't been about the place yet, and I was in the city yesterday. I've just been hearing about you, sir, and you may consider yourself permanently discharged. What's wrong with your foot?"

The gentleman finished his speech not unkindly for, despite his many faults, there was something very winning and lovable about the hot-headed Californian.

"Oh! that's where I sprained it in that fight. I was wrong, sir, and I am not ashamed to apologize, I. I've had time to cool off and I ought to be horsewhipped, sir, I had in truth. I——"

"Quite correct. Yet reserve your apologies. They will not help the matter in your case, though I appreciate your humbling your pride to make them. My orders are from the proprietor and are final. I'm sorry, too, for it will make your cousin's ride to and fro a lonely one. She'd better arrange to stay here all the time. I think there'd be little difficulty about it. The folks at the house like her amazingly."

"Yes, sir, they'd be sure to. She's very lovable and as true as steel. But what I want to find out is where she is. Do you think they'd tell me at the house? or be able to do so? Or is she at work——"

"Didn't I just say that I knew nothing about her? except that the day before yesterday she was promoted to a very important post here. That speaks more for the opinion in which she is held than an hour's talk."

Alarico raised his hat and galloped away to the residence of the proprietor. San Pedro was as famous for its hospitality as its vast business interests and he hoped that Edith had been invited to remain there during the time she had been missing from Santa Rosa.

Yet inquiries failed to elicit any information.

When they came to consider the matter nobody had seen her since the holiday afternoon. Was she not at home still?

No; she had not been at home. Not at all since then. She had ridden away, he believed, upon her burro and with Buff traveling behind her, that day; but what had become of her Alarico could not guess. The Dona Rosalia was frantic with anxiety, and as for the mother Ysidra she could neither eat nor sleep. If it had been one of her own brood, yes, even the little Juan, who was so missing she could not suffer more. No; and what should be done? Where should he look for her, with his lame ankle that was but the just punishment for his badness, yes? Where?

Nobody could suggest where. Was it not a straight road home? Was not the country perfectly safe? Had he searched all along the route?

Yes, he had searched. He had gone out the night before and had ridden even then, despite his pain, almost back to the gates of San Pedro. Quite to the gates he would have come but that he feared the ridicule of his old companions. Was not a girl who could travel

three thousand miles alone, as he had often boasted, was not she wholly capable of crossing a few miles of level mesa?

So he had gone back to his people and nobody had slept at all for the anxiety, no. Now—he was at his wits' end, yes.

Indeed, he seemed so; for he rode everywhere over the great ranch, to places likely and unlikely, questioning, searching, always receiving a negative answer, and always leaving a trail of sympathetic anxiety behind him. For all who had ever seen her remembered the bright beauty and cheerfulness of the young easterner, with her straightforward smile and word and her resolute determination to do whatever she had to do in the very best manner possible. Her thoroughness had already become a household word at San Pedro and her example been used to stimulate the efforts of other women-workers there.

The fruitless search over the great ranch consumed several hours; during which Alarico never relaxed his efforts for a moment, even though his bandaged ankle gave him great pain and the want of food began to turn him faint. But at noon he rode back to the office of the

manager and his expression was now so hopeless and distraught that that gentleman made an employee lift the lad from his saddle and help him to lie down upon a lounge.

"Now, fetch him a tray of food and a big bowl of coffee. After he has eaten he'll feel better and we'll talk the matter over. No, boy. Not a word till after your lunch."

The meal did refresh the weary fellow, and in a measure restored his hope. Yet every time he thought of Edith, and that serious harm had probably come to her, his heart sank and he turned giddy with foreboding.

"Oh! sir. Not till she was lost did any of us understand how dear she had become. Always the helping hand, always the tender word and smile, always the courage to sustain. In truth. There have been dark days at San Rosa since the months when she came, but never once has she been discouraged, never lost sight of the good time coming. Why, even here, she was learning everything, everything, so that sometime—if things should ever brighten with us and we be able to get the precious water—she would know how to do at San Rosa as you all do at San Pedro. There were to be orange

groves and lemons, yes ; and the olive—was she not to take care of the olives here ? Are not the olives of San Pedro the finest in the world ? and what she did here for the master she would do by and by, when the good time came, for her own. And when on the very darkest day of all I urged her to go home to that safe north where she had friends in plenty and every need supplied, would she go ? Not she, in truth. ‘Am I not, too, a Garcelon ? Shall I turn my back upon my own kindred to whom my parents sent me, even after they were dead, because there is no money in their purse ? No. Not I. I have not so learned to love and understand you all. Blood is thicker than water, yes ; and where I am there I will stay until the time comes that everything is bright. Yes.’ Am I to blame then if I grieve for her ? But I must get up and find her. I must indeed.”

The lad’s distress communicated itself to others. In a short time the disappearance of the new olive-girl had become the one topic of discussion.

“She might have been captured by roving Indians—if there were any Indians left in Cali-

fornia with spunk enough to bother anybody. For the sake of reward they might exert themselves——”

“Who’s seen an Indian lately?”

“Nobody.”

“Couldn’t be tramps either. Tramps don’t come to this county to be caught in a trap, for it’s the last down in the country and they’d starve to death over the border, in Mexico.”

The news came to the master’s ears and immediate action was taken. He sent for his chief manager and directed :

“Form a half-dozen bands of our best riders. Give them the swiftest horses. Let each band be led by a cool-headed, trustworthy person. Let food and stimulants and a blanket be carried by each party. Appoint to each a separate part of the country, arrange upon a code of signals, and—find that girl! I’d rather lose every crop on the ranch than that an innocent, helpless child should come to harm. Scatter! Five hundred dollars to the man who finds her. A thousand to him who brings her in safe and sound. Go.”

Thus the chivalrous gentleman ordained, and he was promptly obeyed; while even to his

explicit commands the manager added others. Among these that each searcher should carry food and light for the approaching night, so that none need give over the chase because of hunger or darkness.

Naturally, the news was spread by these many bands in every direction, so that ere many hours had passed there was scarcely a person in the whole countryside who had not heard of Edith's disappearance and felt an almost personal interest in her return.

Yet it was at least twenty-four hours after the search began before news of it penetrated to Eleazer Mason's cottage, where he lay a prisoner to pain and feeling his lumbago a trouble so great he cared not whether he lived or died.

Things had gone badly with the hackman, indeed; small losses had followed the great sinking of his capital in unproductive land; one of his pet horses had run a nail into its foot and would be useless for an indefinite time. Besides these matters, his surrey needed "doing up" for the winter's work, should he be able then, to supply the lame bay's place and regain his former custom. He felt miserably old and lonely and discouraged; and lay listening dis-

mally to the voices of passers-by, borne to him through his open window.

"Any trace of the lost girl yet, neighbor?" asked one.

"Not a trace. Seems as if the earth had opened and swallowed her up."

"Maybe it has. Earthquakes are not unknown in California."

"True enough. But there hasn't been one lately."

"San Pedro's doing the square thing, isn't he? Hear he's stopped all hands that's possible and sent them all over creation. Offered a thousand dollars, too, to the one who finds her."

"Oh! he's square, that ranchman is. A thousand dollars! Jewhittaker! I wish I could strike it that lucky!"

"A lot of folks do, too. Somebody'll get it, sure. She must be found. 'Tain't possible she won't be—dead or alive. What did you say her name was?"

"Hale, I believe. She's a relative of the Garcelons, at San Rosa. Been working at San Pedro for some time and had just been promoted to tend the olive-pickling. The Superintendent at the ranch says she was the smart-

est, most reliable young woman he'd ever tried at the business. They're experimenting with women-workers, you know, hoping to find them more careful. Well, good day. Wish I could join the search."

"I believe I will. A thousand dollars! Why, a thousand dollars would clear my little homestead of debt. What's the name again?"

"Hale. Edith Hale. Light hair, dark eyes, wore a blue flannel dress and rode a piebald burro. Had a dog with her. Wish you luck."

The speakers beneath the open window parted to go each his own way, but they had not taken two steps before they were halted by one of the most terrific yells possible for the mouth of man to emit.

"Hold on! Hold on, I say! You—you—fellows—come in here!"

They paused, irresolute, and Eleazer listened with hushed breathing. Then he heard them moving on and shouted again:

"Help! Murder! Come!"

"That ought to fetch 'em," murmured the liveryman, listening afresh.

In a half-minute the two citizens were within

the sick man's room ; who raising himself stiffly upon one elbow demanded fiercely :

"What was that outrageous yarn you was tellin' each other ! Who's lost ? Anybody ? Quick ! It's a joke, wasn't it ? Quick !"

"Why, Mason ! you sick ! Didn't know it. Sorry to hear it. Anything I can do to help you ?"

"Oh ! you pesky fool ? what you wastin' time for ! Who's lost ? Quick !"

"A girl named Edith Hale. Worker at San Pedro. Been lost three or four days now. Why ? Know her ?"

"Know—her ! My—soul ! But it ain't true, is it ?" he begged piteously.

"Most unfortunately it is only too true. Hold on. Let me help you."

For the old man was trying to leave his bed and making a bad job of the matter. But he waved his assistant aside, pleading :

"Don't mind me ! I'll manage some way. Go to my stable. Saddle the bay—the sound one. Fetch him round here like lightning. Fools, fools, fools ! All these days ! my poor little lamb ! My pretty creatur'—and nobody had sense to look where they'd find her."

"Folks are looking fast enough. There's a thousand dollars connected with this business."

"Hang a thousand dollars! Why, man, that girl—that girl is worth millions!"

With the most horrible contortions of countenance, yet disdaining assistance, Eleazer got himself into riding attire, upon his saddle, and was off like a shot, while his visitors watched him amazed:

"Well, I never knew that the old fellow was so greedy for cash, but it must have been that. Looked as if he were suffering agonies, yet clenched his teeth and went ahead. Whew! he's making that bay travel—he's clear down street already—around the corner—out of sight! Well, I hope he'll win. He ought to with all that grit."

But this judgment was wide of the mark. For it was love not greed which enabled Eleazer Mason to conquer physical disability and ride to the rescue. Yet as he rode, fast and furious, the astonished bay not recognizing his own master in this fierce horseman, it was with a defiant hopelessness, so to speak, in his throbbing heart.

"Too late! too late! She must be dead—

starved—long before this. Faster, you brute! what makes you lag like a snail!”

Yet the animal was running as he had never run before and lessening the distance between the city and Santa Rosa with marvelous rapidity.

Part way across the mesa, just as the old adobe came in sight, Eleazer saw a band of horsemen approaching, and rightly divining that they were intent upon the same errand as himself, halted till they met him. He saluted the leader, none other than the manager who had been so especially pleased with Edith's performance of her duties, and asked:

“The cave? Has anybody searched the cave?”

“What cave?”

“In Pyramid mountain.”

“Didn't know of it.”

“Not where the old Indian woman said was a mine of gold?”

“Pshaw! she'd never go there alone!”

“Wouldn't she? There's where we'll find her—dead or alive!”

The manager gave the command, and himself fell into line behind Eleazer, who still rode like the wind, careless of harm to his beloved bay, and now utterly unmindful of any bodily pain.

“Follow your leader ! a clew ! May the best man win !”

Dona Rosalia saw these men go thundering past the old adobe, so near she could almost have hailed them for a word of inquiry, but she merely wondered why they should still keep up their fruitless haste. Her heart was broken by this last calamity ; and like Alarico, she had not until then realized how closely into her life her northern-born grandchild had grown. For once, even her religion offered small comfort to her grief, which was as yet too fresh and deep for any healing.

As for Ysidra, she sat all day at a corner of the great kitchen fireplace, gazing dejectedly into the ashes, and rousing herself only when her children's clamoring for food became too insistent for denial.

Marta, patient as ever, kept the little ones as quiet as she might, wiping away her own tears to soothe them with the hope that : “ Some day, when Edith comes, we will again play at school keeping. Now, sleep all you can, and trouble nobody.”

Eleazer followed the straight and direct course toward the cave that Susana had taught him, and

all the air was punctuated by his indignant exclamations :

“The fools ! the fools ! The only place—the likeliest place—that idiot Alarico—why didn’t—Oh ! my stars and stripes ! if this old nag would only travel ! ”

They reached the entrance at last. The manager and the foremost riders of his party almost at the same instant when Eleazer drew rein before it; and there they dismounted, fastening their horses and preparing to make their explorations on foot. But there, unfortunately, the hackman found that the will which had helped him to keep his saddle could not sustain his crippled body when he attempted to walk. At the first essay he tottered, groaned and would have fallen, had not his companions caught him up.

“I can’t ! Oh ! my soul, I can’t ! yet—I must—you don’t know the way—you lose time——”

“Don’t worry, Mason. Here, boys. Make a litter of your arms. Let them be your feet, man, and you use your head to keep us to the path.”

“Good. Hurry, hurry ! there may still be time ! ”

For now that they had come thus near the faithful fellow's impatience was uncontrollable, and he was gaining confidence that by some sort of miracle he should find Edith alive. That he should find her in some way he had not from the first at all doubted.

Wherever it was possible the men who carried their helpless guide traveled at double-quick; but in the narrower spaces they were obliged to use a cautious slowness that drove him frantic. But he kept them to the right road, preventing their turning aside into the easier passages which branched off here and there and led none knew where. Their well-trimmed lanterns gave plenty of light, and at last they came to the very chamber where were the curious markings that corresponded to the map of skin. But—the chamber was empty.

“We must stop and get breath, any way. Why, this is an odd thing. We’ve been steadily climbing, I should think, ever since the path first dipped down and then rose again so suddenly. So this is the famous mine, is it? well, if we only had it out of doors what a magnificent reservoir it would make! Do you see, Mason? A great, an immense cup of solid stone! that

looks as if it had been hollowed by day's work for just that purpose! Wonderful, wonderful but——"

"But—we're not all hydraulic engineers, man! Edith isn't here, yet as sure as I live I believe she's somewhere in this mountain. Let's back and try the first side passage we meet. If she isn't there, then the next. There can't be so many but we can search them all. We must. I must, anyway! And I'll give all I own or ever could earn to any of you who will help me! Don't give up, sir! Don't!"

"Why, Mason, we've no thought of giving up—yet. I don't see how anybody could be alive after being lost so long, but—we don't give up any sooner than you. Now, let's go back, as you say, but place some sort of guide-marks to this place; and I say silence is the best for a time. Then, at regular intervals, we'll try hallooing. Back, lads, with your guide."

Back they retired, to a roomy passage which seemed to invite their exploration, and to a question of one of his hearers, Eleazer answered hoarsely:

"Yes. Try it; and pray, boys! Pray as you

never did before that we be led aright! For she's the bonniest maid the sun ever shone upon and the world without her—Hark! Hark! HARK, I say!”

A sound came to them. Faint and muffled but unmistakable.

“A dog! That's a dog barking! Her dog! It is! The little yellow cur that was sent clear across the continent—for this!”

CHAPTER XXII

THE MINE AT LAST

THEY followed that blessed barking over the rambling passage through which it led them, sometimes hearing it distinctly, as if the dog were close at hand, and again so faintly that their hearts sank, believing even he had reached his last breath.

Then at a sudden turn it was quite close; and hurrying around a projecting wall of rock, like the buttress of a cathedral, they found the girl they sought.

She was lying upon the floor of the cavern, and for a time did not respond to their cries of delight; but finally, when Eleazer managed to slide down beside her and lift her head to his breast, she revived from her exhaustion and gazed with half-shut eyes at the group the lantern light showed.

The manager held a cup of water to her

lips and she swallowed it eagerly. Then she faintly gasped:

“Buff!”

But tender arms had already lifted the famished little creature and the blessed life-giving water was slowly trickled down his eager throat, while men who had not wept for years cried now like babies for sheer joy.

There was food and drink in plenty among the searchers; but it was administered most cautiously, though both girl and dog would have eaten ravenously had they been allowed.

At the end of an hour Edith declared herself all right and able to tell her story.

“After we came in, nearly I am sure, to the chamber of the map, we must have made a mistake. I didn’t believe it at first, and went back at once to find the other road. I couldn’t find it. The more I tried the more confused I got. Then I stopped trying and just waited still. It wasn’t so bad. There was my luncheon untasted, and the big basket of fruit that was sent to grandmother. The oddest thing was that the dear little burro followed us. She has been so used to having Buff beside her that when he left her she began to bray wildly and

he to bark, and then she came. It is roomy enough, you know, for all you great men have come now. If she hadn't come with the basket on her saddle we would have starved, but she came. Then you; and now—do you know this cavern isn't all dark?"

They half-believed her mind was wandering. She was certainly growing stronger every moment and not nearly so much in haste to leave the scene of her entombment as her friends were to have her. That is, all save the manager, an expert, as Eleazer had scoffed, in hydraulic engineering.

"What do you mean, dear? Would you rather tell us here, or wait till we get outside?"

"Here, please. And I wish all of you would put out your lanterns for a moment—if you have matches to light them again."

"Plenty of matches."

"Then listen. Be as still as I had to be in here alone."

They obeyed her. After a little, through the silence, they heard a dull roaring sound as of water falling over a precipice. Indeed, the ear of the expert had caught this almost as soon as he entered that part of the cave.

"Do you hear anything?"

"It is water," answered the manager, excitedly.

"Now wait. Have your eyes grown used to the darkness?"

"Yes. It is pitch dark," said one.

"Not quite. Please give me your hand," turning toward the engineer.

He placed it in hers and she guided it till it pointed in a certain direction.

"There. It is light that way. Faintly, like a glimmer, but never changing for hours together. Then it will go away. I made out the difference between day and night that way. I believe there is a little crack in the mountain right straight through to the top and the outside world. Somewhere beyond here, too, is a little stream of water. I have stumbled upon it once or twice, in my creepings around the cave. If you light your lanterns again maybe you can find it."

They did find it, and that it was of the purest, coldest quality. It was to the occasional drinks from this stream and to the basket of fruit the burro had brought inward to her that Edith owed the preservation of her life.

"But the burro? What of her?"

"I don't know. She hung around us till she was famished and I had nothing to give her. So I drove her back along the passage. I hoped her instinct might help to find a way out, even where my human reason failed. Buff would have gone clear back, I guess, only I got frightened and called him to me. I should have died without him, precious doggie! But with him I just kept waiting till—you came. Now——"

"Now, let's get out into God's sunlight as soon as we can!" cried Eleazer, futilely trying to rise.

"Yes. But I suppose the inside of the world is His, too, dear friend. I've done such a lot of thinking since I've been in here, and it seems to me that everything in life—or death—will be so rich, so full of meaning and of purpose to me always now. Why, Mr. Mason! can't you get up? Are you so lame? Yet have come away into this buried place to hunt me up?"

"The pesky rheumatism or lumbago. That's all. An' these fellows here were spoilin' for somethin' to do, so hauled me in their arms. Arms enough to go round, boys? Make a litter

for her, too? If not you take her out first then come back for me."

But two of the strongest, the manager for one, made a chair of hands as children do, and thus bore their restored heroine backward to light and safety. Yet the engineer directed that at every few paces one of the party should leave some sort of landmark as a future guide to the chamber where they had found Edith; for he meant to make a prompt return thither, and believed that from his second visit there would result inestimable benefit.

When they had at last reached the outer valley again and she felt the sunshine on her face and saw through her blinking eyes, unable yet to bear the full radiance, so very fair the earth seemed that her courage for the first time deserted her, reaction came, and bowing her head against Eleazer's arm she sobbed aloud :

"Oh! what if you had not come!"

They let her weep for a moment, believing it would best relieve the tension of her nerves, and then the manager could no longer restrain his eagerness.

"My dear young lady, was it gold that old

La Profetisa mentioned? Was there ever any use of the word gold?"

"Why—I don't know. I don't remember that there was. Do you, Mr. Mason?"

"No. Not once. What she said was 'wealth'; but wouldn't anybody naturally think that signified a gold mine? Eh! What?"

"Then I have to congratulate you. If I am not widely, very, very widely mistaken, you have discovered in the heart of Pyramid mountain something far more valuable than either gold or silver. And that is—Water!"

"Water!"

"Aye, water. Without which California is a desert; with which she is an inexhaustible treasure-house. Within that mountain—and it is all on the San Rosa land, hitherto considered worthless,—sounds the roar of a limitless flood; with a natural-made reservoir of immeasurable capacity; that flood rightly utilized and stored in that reservoir will irrigate this whole parched section till it rivals or exceeds in richness San Pedro itself; and the best of it is—you hold the controlling interest right in hand! Every property-owner near you will become a con-

tributor to your fortune. Allow me to congratulate you ! ”

It was a strange piece of news ; and that water, just plain water, could mean so much was a fact hard to realize. Indeed, for the moment, one feeling of anxiety overbore Edith's rejoicing.

“ I wish I knew what had become of Madam Eastman's little burro ! Do you suppose it really did reach the outer world again ? ”

“ No, my dear. It did not. Put the creature from your mind. It did its appointed work. It saved your life. You will not, likely, ever see it again. ”

She never did. But there was a gentle bay horse made ready for her riding, while Eleazer was put upon another animal belonging to a vacquero, who strode off hastily toward San Pedro to report the grand result of the search.

All the others struck out swiftly for Santa Rosa, whither they soon arrived ; and as Edith saw the beautiful Señora issue from the wide door of the old adobe she called from afar.

“ I'm all safe, grandmother, and I've found the mine ! All our dark days are over ! ”

Then she sprang down and ran up the path

through the garden to be clasped close, close in the frail trembling arms of the lovely old gentlewoman; while the attending party checked their horses at the entrance of the court and bared their heads before the sacredness of this reunion.

.

And afterward! Why, so many things that one glimpse of the old adobe, on an autumn afternoon just five years later, will answer all inquiries most easily.

It is still the old adobe, but quite restored wherever it had fallen into the decay of our first acquaintance with it. All whom we knew then are gathered at a feast of thanksgiving; for the Señora is a lover of anniversaries and keeps each one so punctiliously that her grandchildren have a habit of asking each morning:

“Well, grandmother, heart’s dearest, what do we celebrate to-day?”

This is the memorial of Edith’s escape from the cave and of another return—even more marvelous. For the sea does sometimes give up its dead, or there are counted among its dead some who still live. It was so with Alar-

ico Garcelon, sailor and fine gentleman, in one; who having suffered shipwreck was for many months stranded on a desolate land, but finally rescued thence and shipped again homeward, rejoicing. Where he arrived just one year to a day from that of Edith's restoration and the grand discovery.

But he is a contented landsman now, finding, as he jestingly remarks, abundance of water on his own homestead to satisfy even his craving. Alarico the second, has grown a well-developed and well-balanced man; and it is a significant proof of his present character that as soon as he had earned his first money he insisted upon restoring to San Pedro's proprietor the amount that person lost through his workman's hot temper, on an autumn day five years in the past.

But there are others here, and one must hasten, lest the soup cool and Ysidra's now placid face resume its ancient look of care.

At this wide table on the beautiful veranda, where the vines are curtains and a choir of birds behind them make music for the meal, sits at the head the benignant old Dominie from Sissimissit. For four years now, ever since he

caught that "California fever" which drove him across the continent to behold his Edith again, he has come at the first suspicion of frost in his bleaker New England home.

Of course Aunt Comfort could not allow her father to travel alone for such a distance. She is quite too devoted a daughter for that; so she sits near, chatting with almost girlish gaiety to Madam Eastman, as perennially young and perennially a grumbler as of old. She has conquered her enemy, and the two old gentlewomen, types of the best, are the staunchest of friends; and find the zest of their lives in arguing over the best crops to be planted and the best methods of dispensing charity in the world. But they invariably decide, with a liberality that surprises the friends of both, that the Golden Rule is a wholly satisfying creed and each must live up to it as nearly as she can.

There are other guests to-night: Judge Saunders and his family; to whom all present feel a debt of no small importance. It was by his, the squire's, advice, aided by the engineer's practical knowledge, that the utilization of the imprisoned water of Pyramid mountain was made so easy of accomplishment. He became one of the mon-

eyed investors in the enterprise, of which Eleazer Mason was another.

For despite his vigorous protests the honest fellow was really forced—though, indeed, by Edith's pleading—to accept the thousand dollars reward, which he immediately proceeded to invest in this second venture.

“Only this time it isn't a land boom, you see, but a water one, and it floated all right. Then, as soon as I got back the sum of my investment, I kept it moving. Started a schoolhouse with it, and there's where Edith's old mate, Letty Squibbett, teaches now. She's givin' and gainin' at once, which is doubling things up. Giving education and gaining health.”

When the good clergyman and his daughter Comfort crossed the continent both Eli and his wife Maria refused to be left behind; and at the very last moment before locking the barn-door in old Sissmissit, Eli caught sight of Ma'am Puss. She had escaped innumerable threats upon her life and was even then, as of old, intent upon a supper purloined from a milk-pail.

“Life wouldn't seem just the same if I hadn't that thievin' critter to watch,” reflected the hired man, and surreptitiously huddled her into

a basket which he hastily labeled: "Lunch;" and which he took care to keep well closed till the whole party was on board the train, en route for California.

Arrived at Santa Rosa, Buff welcomed his furry old housemate with a friendly battle, and thereafter the somewhat frightened feline traveler became immediately at home. As for Eli, he did not allow twenty-four hours to elapse before he set about renovating the old barn and fixing things to suit his own fastidious notions. Maria, too, fell into the routine of her life and joined Ysidra in the kitchen where the pair, oddly enough, considering their unlikeness to each other, became the closest of friends.

But old habits cling, and Eli remained a trial to his spouse; who at this very memorable supper-hour appeared in the doorway of the dining-room and beckoned:

"Edith!"

"Yes, Maria."

"I wish you'd call that stupid Eli in from the barn. Ma'am Puss has been in the milk again, and he hasn't no better manners than to keep a whole table full waitin'. I should think

that a cat that has traveled from ocean to ocean would know better'n to cut up so. She might learn from Buff and take shame to herself. The idee ! When my waffles are jest sp'ilin' to be et, too. He'll come for you though he never would for me."

So Edith crosses the court to summon, as of old, the refractory Eli to enjoy a real Yankee supper. She has grown a tall, fine creature, and her gown is as white and spotlessly dainty as the Señora's own. Her face is radiant with happiness and her tones are full of cheerfulness as she hurries forward, with the ever-frivolous Buff at her heels, trying his mischievous best to trip her up—in his own exuberant delight in life.

Eli is found engaged in the characteristic task of brushing an imaginary speck of dust from a new Alderney's coat.

"Eli—Eli ! come to supper !"

"Supper ! How can a fellow have an appetite, scarce as milk is down here, while that pesky cat's stuck her nose in the pail again ? I'll kill that critter before I sleep or——"

"Waffles, Eli ! More than those—Eleazer Mason, your maternal cousin twice removed, is

on the alert to catch Maria making faces at you behind your back. She's getting into a face-making mood very fast; for she's tried herself on these waffles to-night. Eli, waffles with maple syrup from Yankee land and——"

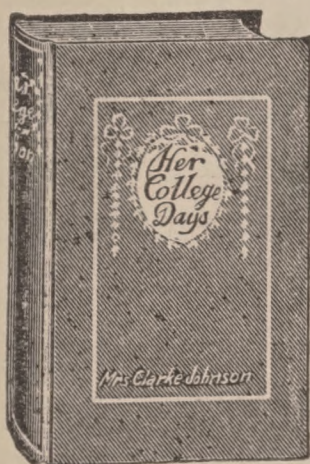
"But she hain't begun, has she? I wouldn't admit to him she ever did, even though you did tell him of it, and——"

"Come on, Buff! Come on, Ma'am Puss of Sissmissit township! Come on, Eli Johnson, dearest old crank in California, and shining example of what minister's folks should be; come on and grace the table of our dear old adobe!"

Still grumbling, though smiling, Eli went.

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STORIES FOR GIRLS

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Her College Days

By Mrs. Clarke Johnson

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

This is a most interesting and healthful tale of a girl's life in a New England college. The trustful and unbounded love of the heroine for her mother and the mutual and self-sacrificing devotion of the mother to the daughter are so beautifully interwoven with the varied occurrences and exciting incidents of college life as to leave a most wholesome impression upon the mind and heart of the reader.

Two Wyoming Girls

By Mrs. Carrie L. Marshall

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

Two girls, thrown upon their own resources, are obliged to "prove up" their homestead claim. This would be no very serious matter were it not for the persecution of an unscrupulous neighbor, who wishes to appropriate the property to his own use. The girls endure many privations, have a number of thrilling adventures, but finally secure their claim and are generally well rewarded for their courage and perseverance.

The Girl Ranchers

By Mrs. Carrie L. Marshall

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

A story of life on a sheep ranch in Montana. The dangers and difficulties incident to such a life are vividly pictured, and the interest in the story is enhanced by the fact that the ranch is managed almost entirely by two young girls. By their energy and pluck, coupled with courage, kindness, and unselfishness they succeed in disarming the animosity of the neighboring cattle ranchers, and their enterprise eventually results successfully.

A Maid at King Alfred's Court

By Lucy Foster Madison

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

This is a strong and well told tale of the 9th century. It is a faithful portrayal of the times, and is replete with historical information. The trying experiences through which the little heroine passes, until she finally becomes one of the great Alfred's family, are most entertainingly set forth. Nothing short of a careful study of the history of the period will give so clear a knowledge of this little known age as the reading of this book.

A Maid of the First Century

By Lucy Foster Madison

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

A little maid of Palestine goes in search of her father, who for political reasons, has been taken as a slave to Rome. She is shipwrecked in the Mediterranean, but is rescued by a passing vessel bound for Britain. Eventually an opportunity is afforded her for going to Rome, where, after many trying and exciting experiences, she and her father are united and his liberty is restored to him.

A Yankee Girl in Old California

By Evelyn Raymond

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

A young girl, reared among most delightful surroundings in Vermont, suddenly discovers that, owing to a clause in her father's will, she must make her future home with relatives in the lower portion of old California. No more interesting experience could come in the life of any bright, observing girl than that of an existence in this semi-tropical region, with its wealth of Spanish tradition and romance, its glorious climate, its grand scenery, and its abundance of flowers and foliage.

My Lady Barefoot

By Mrs. Evelyn Raymond

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

A beautifully told story of the trials of a little backwoods girl who lives in a secluded place with an eccentric uncle, until his death. The privations she undergoes during his life-time, her search for other relatives, her rather uncongenial abode with them, her return to her early home to acquire her uncle's estate, and thus to enjoy a useful and happy life, form a most interesting narrative of a girl whose ruggedness and simplicity of character must appeal to the admiration of all readers.

The Ferry Maid of the Chattahoochee

By Annie M. Barnes

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

An heroic little Georgia girl, in her father's extremity, takes charge of his ferry, and through many vicissitudes and several impending calamities, succeeds in carrying out her purpose of supporting her invalid parent and his family. The heroine's cheerfulness and hearty good humor, combined with an unflinching zeal in her determination to accomplish her work, make a character which cannot fail to appeal to young people.

Dorothy Day

By Julie M. Lippmann

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

This is a most interesting story of a bright and spirited young girl whose widowed mother re-marries. The impulsive girl chafes under the new relationship, being unwilling to share with another the bounteous love of her mother which she had learned to claim wholly for her own. By the exercise of great tact and kindness, the obdurate Dorothy is at last won over, and becomes a most estimable girl.

Miss Wildfire

By Julie M. Lippmann

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

The story of a governess' attempt to win the love and confidence of her ward, who, owing to a lack of early restraint, is inclined to be somewhat of a hoyden. The development of the girl's character and her eventual victory over her turbulent disposition combine to form a story of unusual merit and one which will hold its reader's eager attention throughout.

"A story of girls for girls that teaches a moral without labeling or tagging it at the end." — *Western Christian Advocate*, Cincinnati, O.

Her Father's Legacy

By Helen Sherman Griffith

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

Suddenly bereft of father and fortune, a young girl finds herself face to face with the world. Except for a deed to some waste land, there is practically no estate whatever. To make matters worse, the executor of the estate endeavors to appropriate the deed to the land. The heroine engages in a long and heroic struggle for its possession. She succeeds in regaining it, and the land itself proves to be most valuable because of its location in a rich oil-producing district.

An Odd Little Lass

By Jessie E. Wright

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

This is a story of the regeneration of a little street waif. She begins life in a lowly court of a large city. Her adventures are numerous, and often quite exciting. After a time she is transplanted to the country, where after many thrilling experiences she eventually grows into a useful and lovable young woman. The story is pleasantly told, and abounds in interesting incident.

"The story is an intensely interesting one, and abounds in pleasing and unique situations."—*Religious Telescope*, Dayton, Ohio.

An Every-Day Heroine

By Mary A. Denison

Illustrated by Ida Waugh

The heroine is not an impossible character but only a pure, winsome, earnest girl, who at fourteen years of age is suddenly bereft of fortune and father and becomes the chief support of a semi-invalid mother. While there are many touching scenes, the story as a whole is bright and cheerful and moves forward with a naturalness and ease that carries its readers along and makes them reluctant to put down the book until the end is reached.

STORIES FOR BOYS

The Boer Boy of the Transvaal

By Kate Milner Rabb

Illustrated by F. A. Carter

The career of the Boer boy is one series of exciting adventures. In the gallant service for his country he comes face to face with President Kruger, General Cronje, and General Joubert. Much interesting information pertaining to this country and its people is introduced, and the reader will understand as never before the cause of the intense hatred of the Boers for the British.

Uncrowning a King

By Edward S. Ellis, A. M. Illustrated by J. Steeple Davis

A tale of the Indian war waged by King Philip in 1675. The adventures of the young hero during that eventful period, his efforts in behalf of the attacked towns, his capture by the Indians, and his subsequent release through the efforts of King Philip himself, with a vivid account of the tragic death of that renowned Indian chieftain, form a most interesting and instructive story of the early days of the colonies.

At the Siege of Quebec

By James Otis

Illustrated by F. A. Carter

Two boys living on the Kennebec River join Benedict Arnold's expedition as it passes their dwelling en route for the Canadian border. They, with their command, are taken prisoners before Quebec. The description of the terrible march through the wilderness, the incidents of the siege, and the disastrous assault, which cost the gallant General Montgomery his life, are in the highest degree thrilling, while at the same time true in every particular.

In the Days of Washington

By William Murray Graydon Illustrated by J. C. Claghorn

The story opens in Philadelphia just prior to its evacuation by the British in 1778. Nathan Stanbury, a bright lad of seventeen, joins the Continental Army which is then suffering the hardships of the winter at Valley Forge. A short time later the Battle of Monmouth is fought, and in this the young hero figures quite prominently, as he does afterward at the Massacre of Wyoming.

On Wood Cove Island

By Elbridge S. Brooks Illustrated by Frederic J. Boston

A trio of bright New England children are given an island on which to spend their summer vacation. Here they establish a little colony, the management of which gives them a large amount of amusement and at times causes some seemingly serious difficulties. In the solution of their perplexing problems the young people receive much encouragement and counsel from the poet Longfellow, whose delightful acquaintance they form in a very unexpected and amusing manner.

Under the Tamaracks

By Elbridge S. Brooks

Illustrated

An interesting and healthful story for boys and girls, representing a summer's outing of young people among the Thousand Islands. It is timed to include the visit of General Grant at Alexandria Bay, and several interesting conversations between one of the boys and the hero of the Rebellion shed pleasing side lights upon the great General's character.

"General Grant's talks with the heroes will captivate the heart of every boy."—*Teachers' World*, New York.

The Wreck of the Sea Lion

By W. O. Stoddard

Illustrated by John H. Betts

Tales of the sea are always fascinating to young people, especially when some active, adventuresome boys supply plenty of thrilling escapades to add to the interest. The story of an eventful cruise in Southern waters, as told by an old sea captain, and the ludicrous boastings and experiments of a would-be scientist, constitute a pleasing variety of incident, and afford just that amount of instructive material needed to make a perfect book for young readers.

The Young Financier

By W. O. Stoddard

Illustrated by John H. Betts

A unique story, the scene of which is laid in the money centre of New York City. The young hero begins life as a broker's messenger and passing rapidly from one post to another in good time rises to a position of importance and responsibility. Numerous exciting experiences incident to the eventual success in his business career all combine to form a most interesting narrative.

True to His Trust

By Edward S. Ellis, A. M. Illustrated by J. Steeple Davis

The hero of this story will win his way at once into the heart of every one, and his pluck and perseverance will carry the sympathy of every reader through his many adventures, struggles, and singular experiences. Like all of the author's works, the incidents teach in the most convincing manner that true manliness and sturdy integrity are the only principles through which happiness and success in life are possible.

Comrades True

By Edward S. Ellis, A. M.

Illustrated

In following the career of two friends from youth to manhood, the author weaves a narrative of intense interest. This story is more realistic than is usual, as the two heroes pass through the calamitous forest fires in Northern Minnesota and barely escape with their lives. They have other thrilling adventures and experiences in which the characteristics of each are finely portrayed.

"Among juveniles there is not one of greater interest, or more wholesome influence than 'Comrades True.'"—*Sentinel*, Milwaukee, Wis.

Among the Esquimaux

By Edward S. Ellis, A. M.

Illustrated

The scenes of this story are laid in the Arctic region, the central characters being two sturdy boys whose adventurous spirit often leads them into dangerous positions. They visit Greenland; go on a hunting expedition, have a number of stirring adventures, but ultimately reach home safe and sound.

"A capital and instructive book for boys."—*Post*, Boston, Mass.

The Campers Out

By Edward S. Ellis, A. M.

Illustrated

Many of the scenes are so vividly described that the reader can, in his imagination, enjoy the excitement of the chase and all the pleasures of a good camping tour. In addition to the vivid descriptions of many exciting adventures, this story teaches a lesson in morals that cannot fail to prove helpful to every reader.

"Well planned and well written. Full of adventure of just the right sort."—*Mid-Continent*, St. Louis, Mo.

The Young Gold Seekers

By Edward S. Ellis, A. M. Illustrated by F. A. Carter

A thrilling account of the experiences of two boys during a trip to the gold fields of Alaska. The hardships that they endure, the disappointments they suffer, the courage and perseverance that they manifest in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and their eventual success in their undertaking, are all most graphically portrayed.

Andy's Ward

By James Otis

Illustrated

A fascinating narrative of the life and experiences of "Museum Marvels." They dwell in a house owned by a sword-swallower, whose wife, the "Original Circassian," is entrusted with its management. The rest of the household includes a dwarf, nick-named the "Major," a fat lady, a giant, and a snake-charmer. The private life of the marvels forms a story full of incident, and one that possesses that peculiar simplicity of style which has won for this author such a host of readers.

Chasing a Yacht

By James Otis

Illustrated

A semi-nautical tale of adventure about boys, written for boys, and will certainly be appreciated by boys wherever they may be found. The story of how the heroes, two bright, manly fellows, built a steam yacht, how she was stolen from them, and how they eventually regained possession of her, is full of life and is replete with exciting and interesting incident.

"Boys who do not read this volume with real pleasure must be hard to suit."—*Journal*, Minneapolis, Minn.

The Braganza Diamond

By James Otis

Illustrated

A volume that will hold its readers spell-bound as they follow the two boy characters and the bright, courageous girl in their search for the famous diamond. Much useful information is incidentally conveyed and many things with which few persons are familiar are explained.

"It will rivet the attention of young readers as much as Robinson Crusoe."—*Call*, San Francisco, Cal.

The Lost Galleon

By W. Bert Foster

Illustrated by J. Steeple Davis

The search for a lost treasure ship and her eventual discovery form the basis of this very dramatic story. The plot is intensely interesting, and rivets the attention throughout the entire narrative. The story possesses a great deal of originality, and is free from the conventional incidents that usually characterize stories of this description. Incidentally, much valuable information is afforded the reader by the insight that is given into the ship-chandlery business, in which the young hero engages as the means of earning a livelihood.

Exiled to Siberia

By William Murray Graydon *Illustrated by F. A. Carter*

This is one of the most thrilling stories ever written. The heroes, two American boys, become involved in a political plot that nearly costs them their lives. As nearly all the action occurs in the mines and military prisons of frozen Siberia it can readily be imagined that in the midst of such dramatic surroundings the interest is most intense. The plot is absorbing, the adventure exciting, the movement rapid, and the style unsurpassed.

Vote

